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OBSERVABILITY IN SCHOOL SYSTEMS, A PROBLEM OF INTER-SYSTEM INTEGRATION.

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THIS EXTENSIVE STUDY INVESTIGATED THE SPECIFIC ARRANGEMENTS PROVIDED BY TWELVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND EIGHT HIGH SCHOOLS IN EIGHT NEW JERSEY COMMUNITIES TO ENCOURAGE PARENTS INVOLVEMENT IN, KNOWLEDGE ABOUT, AND SUPPORT OF THE SCHOOLS. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THESE ARRANGEMENTS ARE ASSESSED ACCORDING TO (1) THE EXPRESSED SATISFACTION OF 1,392 MOTHERS OF FIRST-, FIFTH-, AND 10TH-GRADE CHILDREN, (2) THE MOTHERS' WILLINGNESS TO SUPPORT INCREASED SCHOOL SPENDING, AND (3) THE EXPECTED RATE OF THEIR VOTING IN FAVOR OF A SCHOOL BOND ISSUE. DATA WERE DRAWN ALMOST ENTIRELY FROM INTERVIEW SCHEDULES. THE EIGHT COMMUNITIES WHICH WERE SELECTED CONSISTED OF A RURAL VILLAGE, TWO SMALL TOWNS, FOUR SUBURBS, AND A MEDIUM-SIZED CITY. NEGRO AND WHITE PARENTS FROM THE MIDDLE- AND WORKING-CLASSES ARE RESIDENTS IN THESE COMMUNITIES. THE THEORETICAL BASIS FOR THE STUDY IS PRESENTED IN AN IN-DEPTH DISCUSSION OF COMMUNICATION STRUCTURES EXISTING IN AND BETWEEN SUCH SOCIAL SYSTEMS AS THE SCHOOL AND ITS PARENT POPULATION. (LB)

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Cooperative Research Project No. 6-8967 - 24

Nathalie Schacter Friedman

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Nathalie Schaecter Friedman

Bureau of Applied Social Research
Columbia University
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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND THE SETTING

Whenever people become involved in social interaction, a social system emerges and introduces the problem of the integration of the system. Parsons has observed:

> Internal differentiation, which is a fundamental property of all systems, requires integration. It is a condition of the existence of the system that the differentiated roles must be coordinated, either negatively, in the sense of the avoidance of disruptive interference with each other, or positively, in the sense of contributing to the realization of certain collective goals through collaborated activity.[1]

Integration is, however, too broad a concept to treat either theoretically or empirically without further specification. Landecker has suggested that in order to treat the question of the integration of smaller units into social wholes

> . . . it seems advisable to break it [the concept of integration] up into as many subtypes as one can distinguish and to use each subdivision as a variable for research.[2]

Accordingly, Landecker combines cultural standards (norms) on the one hand, and persons and their behavior on the other to identify four kinds of integration of a social system:

1) cultural integration, or the consistency of norms within any social system,
2) normative integration, or the consistency between the norms for and the actual behavior of persons,
3) functional integration, or integration among persons in the sense of an exchange of services or a division of labor,
4) communicative integration, or integration among persons in the sense of an exchange of meanings.[3]

In Landecker's view, if a system is to maintain itself, it must have a certain amount of consistency among the cultural standards which govern behavior.[4] If stability is to be maintained, it requires at least a modicum of congruency between norms and behavior. If equilibrium is to persist, there must be a satisfactory division of labor among group members. And finally, to achieve all these results, there must be an effective communication system among group members.

The degree to which cultural, normative, and functional integration are requirements for group stability and survival is problematic and so needs empirical investigation. Although it is not central to the present discussion, it should be noted that inconsistencies may exist, and in complex systems do exist, both among cultural universals and within cultural specialties, which may not be perceived or experienced by members of the system, and which thus may not interfere with cultural integration.[5] As Landecker notes:

> What may appear to an outsider as a logical contradiction is not necessarily felt as such by those who live under these standards. Therefore the earmark of inconsistency among standards should be an experienced difficulty.[6]

Accordingly, inconsistency of standards or dissensus among individuals may not be perceived by members of the system, and whether or not perceived, such inconsistency or dissensus -- if it exists between, rather than within, specialized sub-groups -- may not endanger the equilibrium of the total system.

Similarly, it is conceivable that the stability of the group will be unimpaired even when actual role-performance is incongruent with the norms prevailing in the group if the behavior of those who are deviating from prescribed norms is not visible to those who occupy positions of authority. Furthermore, the norms governing various role-performances may differ in their intensity; that is, certain behavior may be permitted, preferred, prescribed, or proscribed.[7] Thus different kinds of behavior may be met with different degrees of dismay or approval. In some situations, failure to conform behaviorally to prescribed norms may be overlooked as long as one subscribes vocally, or maintains what Merton has called "doctrinal conformity"[8] to a set of norms.

The degree of functional integration, or the extent to which the functions exercised by members of a group constitute mutual services, may also vary "from extreme interdependence to a high degree of self-sufficiency"[9] without impairing the viability of the group. The degree of complexity and specialization within a system is usually, but not necessarily, a determinant of the extent of mutual interdependence among sub-groups. It is necessary to ascertain not only the extent of internal differentiation, but also the extent to which internally differentiated sub-groups perform, and must perform, mutual services in order to ensure group survival. In an emergency situation, such as the army in wartime, the degree of functional integration must perhaps be at its fullest, with each person or sub-group responsible for a particular task which will contribute to the survival of the whole. Under ordinary circumstances, however, the extent to which mutual services are being performed within a system may permit a fairly wide range of variation.

Landecker suggests that to a large degree the maintenance of an optimum of cultural, normative, and functional integration is dependent upon the extent to which communicative integration exists. He says:

> The extent to which communicative contacts permeate a group, the degree of its communicative integration, will bear some relation to the integration among its cultural standards and the integration of conduct with these standards.[10]

Increased understanding, therefore, of the social processes through which cultural, normative, and functional integration exist and contribute to the maintenance of the system necessitates an analysis of the communication structure through which individuals in a system make their norms and role-performances visible.

Barnard attests to the importance of such an analysis when he states:

> The structure, extent, and scope of an organization are almost entirely determined by communication techniques.[11]

In fact, says Simmel:

> Obviously, all relations which people have to one another are based on their knowing something about one another . . . without such knowledge . . . interaction could not take place at all.[12]

The "obviousness" of Simmel's statement does not obviate the necessity for examining some of the means through which such knowledge is obtained. Although these means will vary depending upon such factors as the size and extent of internal differentiation of the group, or the quality and frequency of interaction within the group, every social system, large or small, has the problem of maintaining a steady and reliable flow of information among its members.

In everyday face-to-face contact often a gesture, a grimace, a word will suffice to inform those about us as to our wishes, our fears, our feelings, our standards. As members of small groups, the problem of providing sufficient information about behavior and normative commitment for the maintenance of group integration is usually handled without the necessity of formally structured arrangements. The diffuse, informal, everyday, affective contacts prevailing in small groups, such as the family, make a formal communication structure unnecessary. Even in small groups, however, although such arrangements may not be formalized, certain mechanisms exist for the maintenance of intra-system communication. The small talk at family dinner, for instance, may keep family members informed of one another's activities and opinions. This mode of interchange may help achieve consensus regarding norms, conformity between conduct and norms, and recognition, if not reconciliation, of dissensus and non-conformity.

In large, complex organizations, formal devices and channels usually exist which serve to increase communication within and between departments or hierarchical levels. Regular departmental reports, memos to supervisors, the grading system in schools, double-entry bookkeeping in business firms all contribute to keep members informed about selected aspects of organizational behavior. Such mechanisms presumably promote the effective functioning of the organization for they serve to render organizational members accountable to one another and to facilitate the effective exercise of social control within the group.

Since all social systems are to some extent accountable to selected individuals or groups outside of their boundaries, they must also provide some means of articulation with selected other systems in the society. Accordingly, organizations which are in some measure accountable to the public, to some segment of the public, or to some other organization, and over which these "non-members" exercise some measure of social control, provide certain mechanisms through which their goals and activities may become visible to some degree. Thus government officials, over whom constituents exercise social control on Election Day, utilize newspapers, letters, or The Congressional Record to make their stands on public issues visible. Similarly, corporations issue regular reports of their activities and financial status to stockholders, and public relations experts are hired by colleges, hospitals, and governmental agencies to increase public knowledge and support of the organizations' goals and practices.

The success of these mechanisms is problematic, for to keep a public informed may involve more than merely providing arrangements through which information may be obtained. Stockholder's reports frequently reach the wastebasket unopened or unread. Not all public information campaigns produce significant increments in knowledge among the public,[13] and not all advertising campaigns serve to increase the volume of sales.

Most studies of organizational communication structure have focussed upon intra-group communication, that is, upon an analysis of the channels through which messages are sent and received, the content of such messages, and the effects of both channel and content on the quality of performance and the level of morale of organizational members.[14] Little research, however, has focussed upon the means whereby and the success with which organizations articulate with individuals and groups which are external to the basic organizational structure.

Any understanding, however, of how a society maintains a minimum of integration among its various sub-units through the communication process, necessitates an analysis of the arrangements through which organizations articulate with non-members, as well as an analysis of the effectiveness of such arrangements in increasing the level of knowledge among non-members. It may be that differences in knowledge which have been found to obtain among members of a given system, or among non-members regarding a given system, cannot be attributed solely to individual differences in perceptual sensitivity, but rather may be related to patterned variations in the extent to which formally structured arrangements or opportunities for such knowledge are available to individuals and utilized by them.

The Concept of Observability

The notion of variation in structural opportunities for gaining knowledge about selected aspects of organizational behavior has been most fully stated by Merton.[15] Approximately a decade ago, an old concept, clothed in new sociological garb was rescued by Merton from a state of relative oblivion: the concept of visibility or observability. Defined as

> . . . the extent to which the norms and role-performances within a group are readily open to observation by others . . .[16]

the notion of visibility or observability[17] was introduced by Merton as one of twenty-six group properties[18] which might be useful in classifying groups on other than a purely substantive basis, and which might promote

> . . . the discovery of uniformities in the selection of types of groups as reference groups under designated conditions.[19]

Thus Merton considered the property of observability-visibility to be particularly relevant to reference group theory. For implicit in reference group theory is the notion that if individuals select a particular membership or non-membership group as a source of their norms and expectations, they must have some knowledge of the norms and expectations prevailing among members of that group.

In his study of changing political values among Bennington students,[20] Newcomb had questioned the extent to which students were aware of the trend from conservative to liberal attitudes from the freshman to the senior year. For obviously, those students who were unaware of this trend could not have been using the student body or the college community as an explicit reference group for their political values. Although Newcomb found certain personality attributes which helped to account for differential levels of awareness of this trend, such as the degree of involvement with personal problems or the extent of a negativistic attitude toward the Bennington community, he concluded that there were also structural factors, such as prestige rank and degree of integration within the student community, which served as determinants of accuracy of perception of the "conservative to liberal" trend.[21] This conclusion concurs with Merton's statement that

> . . . the theory of reference group behavior must include in its fuller psychological elaboration some treatment of the dynamics of perception and in its sociological elaboration some treatment of channels of communication through which this knowledge is gained.[22]

While the notion of observability-visibility may be of particular evidence to reference group theory, it is also relevant to an understanding of inter- and intra-system integration. For "the extent to which the norms and role performances within a group are readily open to observation by others" may be a crucial determinant of the effectiveness with which the group may function and endure.

We have noted that among the requirements which must be met if a social system is to endure, are those of accountability and social control. Workers are accountable to peers and superordinates for the amount and quality of output; students are accountable to teachers and parents with regard to their level of academic achievement; nurses are accountable to doctors for looking after certain aspects of the care of the patient. Similarly, those in positions of leadership must effectively exercise social control if standards are to be maintained and deviant behavior inhibited.

Accordingly, Merton discusses observability-visibility as a functional requirement for the effective exercise of social control and accountability within social systems. He says:

> Whether they realize it or not, people who are effectively engaged in exercising social control must in some sense be informed about the norms obtaining in the group, just as they must be informed about the actual behavior of members of the group.[23]

Similarly,

> . . . some measure of observability of role performance by members of the role set is required, if the indispensable requirement of accountability is to be met.[24]

The faculty of a university provide a degree of accountability through their publications in academic journals. In a public welfare agency regular case reports serve to apprise supervisors of the quality of workers' role-performances. In his study of a public employment agency, Blau showed how the requirement of accountability of workers to supervisors was met by having employees keep and submit statistical records of all cases which they handled.[25]

Thus, a certain measure of observability or socially-structured access to information about group norms and role-performances is a necessary requirement for the effective functioning of the group.[26] This notion is analogous to Landecker's proposition that

> The extent to which communicative contacts permeate a group, the degree of its communicative integration, will bear some relation to the integration among its cultural standards and the integration of conduct with these standards (see p. 4 above).

Both Merton and Landecker point to the need for research to indicate the extent to which observability is essential for the effective functioning of the group (Merton), or communicative integration for the maintenance of cultural, normative, or functional integration (Landecker).[27] The latter points to the need for such research and suggests a starting point:

> The precise statement of these relationships awaits research; and as prerequisites for such research, ways are needed to determine the degree to which the members of a group are linked to one another through communication.[28]

Merton is more specific in his formulation of several problems suggested by the notion of observability. He states that

> . . . studies are needed not only to establish the initial facts of the case -- whether authorities in effectively operating groups, both formal and informal, generally do have greater knowledge than others of the norms and behavior obtaining in the group -- but also to identify the structural arrangements and group processes which provide for such visibility [observability].[29]

Furthermore,

> Differentials in visibility [observability] are not merely givens or 'happenstances'; they are the resultants of functional requirements being met by the structure of the group and by the norms which support that structure.[30]

The above statements, together with that quoted in footnote 26, suggest four specific research problems:

1) The identification of specific arrangements or devices through which knowledge of group norms and role-performance may be obtained by group members or non-members.
2) The isolation of those "structural factors" which tend to be associated with the provision or restriction of such arrangements;
3) The establishment of the relationship between access to knowledge and actual knowledge; and
4) The determination of that "optimum level of observability" which is conducive to the effective exercise of social control.

The intent of this study is to investigate the first three of these problems systematically.[31] The research site for this purpose will be the public school and its parent-clientele. For though Merton's discussion of observability centers on the necessity for certain statuses within the group to have access to information regarding group norms and activities, the concept of observability may also be useful for investigating the extent of knowledge or information about an organization by non-members.

Observability in School Systems

As we have noted, every organization operates within the context of a wider social and cultural environment with which a certain amount of articulation is required. Members of Congress must respond to constituencies, retail associations must consider consumer demand, universities are accountable to alumni associations. Any group, formal or informal, large or small, finds itself faced with the problem of providing information to -- or obtaining information from -- groups or individuals outside of its boundaries. For often it is non-members to whom an organization may be accountable, and frequently it is non-members who exercise a degree of social control over an organization.

Because of the dependence of the American school (in contrast to the English or French school systems) on the local public for financial support, school personnel must render a certain measure of accountability to parents and community. Similarly, the parent and the community exercise some control over the school through their power to approve or defeat proposed school budgets at the polls. For this reason, American schools have initiated certain mechanisms for the purpose of increasing the visibility of school goals and practices. PTA's, Open School Weeks, Back-to School Nights, parent-teacher conferences, and report cards have traditionally served as arrangements through which parents may obtain information about school matters.

Schools have tried to keep parents informed through these devices because they believe that parents who are well-informed about the objectives and practices of their local schools and who are brought within the orbit of the school system will also be inclined to support the school's programs and goals. This assumption is made explicit by Bolmeier, for example, who says:

> One of the greatest barriers to educational progress is the general lack of knowledge regarding education. . . . Even the factual understanding of local educational problems is pitifully meager for the majority of American citizens. It is quite understandable therefore that there should be a

> growing reluctance to support our expanding public-school system.[32]

Similarly, Carter in Communities and Their Schools says:

> Today, about a fourth of all the money requested in bond issues is not approved by the voters . . . the most frequent response [of the schools] is to try to bridge the gap with an informational program. . . . An attempt is made to increase public understanding of educational problems and, hopefully, the acceptance of its financial programs.[33]

The ideology underlying the increased effort of educational administrators to improve communication channels between home and school and to enlist parental support of school programs and policies is clearly summarized in the following long resolution recently adopted by the New York City Board of Education:

> WHEREAS, By law and tradition, all aspects of a public school system's operations are of public interest and concern, and the Board of Education welcomes and encourages the active participation of citizens in planning for the highest excellence of their public schools; and
>
> WHEREAS, The community must have full access to information if its involvement in the schools is to be effective, responsible and useful; and
>
> WHEREAS, Full disclosure of information must undergird all the activities now carried on by the Board of Education and the staff to effect cooperation between the schools and the communities they serve; and
>
> WHEREAS, Local School Boards which are the main liaison between the Board of Education and the local communities as well as parent and parent-teacher associations must be properly informed if their essential assistance in seeking continued improvement of the schools is to be achieved; and
>
> WHEREAS, The effectiveness of programs, experiments and demonstrations are a matter of concern to the whole professional staff and to the parents and citizens of the City; and
>
> WHEREAS, Effective communication between the school system and the public includes also the receipt and consideration of community attitudes, reactions, and proposals; be it, therefore

> RESOLVED, That the Board of Education adopts the following policy with regard to communication between the schools and the public, for continued implementation by the Superintendent of Schools and his staff in schools, districts, and central offices:
>
> 1. The school system -- Central Headquarters, District Offices and Schools -- will inform Local School Boards, parent and parent-teacher associations and the general public about the administration and operation of the schools frankly and completely, by every possible medium.
>
> 2. All reports of evaluations of experimental, demonstration and on-going programs in the school system will be submitted by the Superintendent of Schools to the Board of Education and are to be made public immediately after the Superintendent and the Board have had an opportunity to read and discuss them. All new programs, demonstrations and experiments are to have evaluation procedures built into them prior to adoption by the Board of Education.
>
> 3. Results of standardized tests of pupil achievement and other pertinent measures of performance will be made available to Local School Boards, parent and parent-teacher associations and the general public.
>
> 4. The school system will use every possible means to ascertain public attitudes and invite constructive suggestions about all phases of its operation for consideration in the planning of policies and procedures.
>
> 5. Every employee of the school system has a role in the improvement of communication between the schools and the public. The Superintendent of Schools will develop a comprehensive and continuing program of in-service training in school-community relations for the professional and administrative staffs of schools, districts, and central offices.[34]

This long statement emphatically describes the importance assigned to the problem of providing information about school operations to the community. It recognizes that parents are seeking more and more of a voice in the determination of school policy and even in the selection of school personnel.[35] Although past polls[36] have indicated that the overwhelming majority of parents are satisfied with the performance of their local schools, current newspaper reports suggest increasing dissatisfaction and expressed discontent, especially among the ghetto population of our large cities. The demand for power on the part of these groups places an increasing burden on schools to provide parents with more information about the operation of schools in order to ensure that such power will be exercised by informed and knowledgeable parent groups. The degree to which schools provide formally structured opportunities for parents to obtain such information is thus hardly an academic question. For the answer to this, and to a series of related questions, may well shed light on one of the foremost problems facing today's public schools -- namely that of maintaining an informed and satisfied parent clientele which will support and buttress school programs and policies.

Specific Problems to Be Investigated

In the previous section we outlined a series of questions stemming from the discussion of observability which merit investigation. At this point, let us rephrase these questions to make them applicable to our research site -- a number of public schools and their parent clientele.

1. The Location of Observability Arrangements

Ideology notwithstanding, the gap between intent and practice may be a wide one. While educators may proclaim the importance of involving parents in school affairs, many schools offer only limited arrangements through which parents may obtain information about school goals and practices. Others overwhelm the parent with opportunities to become involved and knowledgeable regarding school matters. In Chapter II, after identifying the various arrangements employed by schools in our sample, we shall proceed to find out the kinds of school and types of community in which such arrangements are relatively abundant or scarce. What are the characteristics of the schools and communities which tend to leave parents to their own devices in obtaining school-related information? How can we account for such variations? Are such arrangements needed more in some types of communities and schools than in others? Are they the products of differing degrees of normative support on the part of school personnel or their parent-clients? These questions will be examined in Chapter II.

2. The Utilization of Observability Arrangements

The sheer existence of opportunities to obtain information about the school does not necessarily lead to the utilization of such opportunities, any more than publishing news about a particular event in a newspaper guarantees that it will be widely read. Similarly, school personnel and leaders of parent groups frequently complain about poor attendance at PTA meetings or at other community meetings on school matters. Bolmeier says:

> Too few school patrons attend PTA gatherings or other meetings at which local school problems are discussed.[37]

A survey of 400 teachers by Redbook noted that the most frequent complaint of teachers was that parents fail to attend school meetings of any kind.[38] In Chapter III, we shall investigate the extent to which the various arrangements provided by the schools in the sample are actually utilized by parents. Which arrangements are utilized more fully and regularly than others? How do attendance rates differ, if at all, in various types of communities? If they differ, how is this to be interpreted? Do the usual socio-economic differences in rates of participation persist, or change, when opportunities for participation are equalized for parents of differing status?

3. The Relation Between Opportunities for Knowledge and Actual Knowledge

It is problematic whether the utilization of opportunities for information actually leads to acquiring that information. A study of knowledge and attitudes regarding the Eichmann trial found that while 84% of the sample had read or heard about the trial through the mass media, only about half of these were able to answer correctly two or more of four questions of fact posed to them.[39] Similarly, Janowitz and his associates reported that the degree of contact with selected public agencies was unrelated to the extent of information acquired about the agency's goals and activities.[40] Chapters IV through VI will focus on the relationship between utilization of arrangements for observability by parents and the actual extent of their information about the school. Which arrangements, when utilized, lead most to the acquiring of school-related information? What kind of parents, in which community settings, appear to get the most and least information from an "Open Door Policy"? Does the "informational climate" of the school which maintains an Open Door Policy have an effect on the level of parental information beyond that produced by the utilization of school-provided arrangements? If so, how can this be interpreted? What are the relative effects on the level of parental knowledge of individual attributes, such as interest, motivation, or educational background, as compared to contextual properties, such as the size or socio-economic level of the community or the "observability climate" of the school?

4. Formal vs. Informal Channels of Knowledge

It is evident that parents' knowledge about the schools does not depend only upon the schools providing of PTA's or other formal arrangements. Many parents have never attended a PTA meeting, yet are well-informed about school matters. A casual chat with the teacher or principal, the daily questions about school when the child comes home, conversations with neighbors -- all these may serve as sources of information about school matters.

In chapter VII we shall focus on parents' use of channels other than those formally provided by the school. What kinds of parents in which community settings utilize these channels, and what level of information is associated with their use? Do these channels serve as alternative channels, in the absence of formal school-provided arrangements or as supplementary channels? What is the level of knowledge when parents are left to their own devices to obtain information about school matters? How is this level of knowledge affected when the school intervenes and provides formal arrangements for parents to become informed?

5. The Relation Between Parental Knowledge and Parental Support

Educational personnel are trying more and more to improve the channels of communication between home and school on the assumption that involved and knowledgeable parents will become satisfied and supportive parents. Yet it is not clear that one necessarily leads to the other.

Chapters VIII and IX examine the relationship between parental involvement, knowledge, satisfaction, and readiness to support increased school spending. Do the provision and utilization of school-structured arrangements for parental observability add to parental satisfaction and to the likelihood of a "yes" plurality in a school bond election? In fact, do satisfaction and "financial readiness" go hand in hand, or is a certain amount of dissatisfaction functional in motivating recognition of the need for increased school spending? Had all schools in the sample been generous in providing formal school-structured arrangements for informing parents about the school, to what extent could they have expected to increase the likelihood of a "yes" vote in the school bond elections?

These questions will be explored for their bearing on the more general questions raised earlier in this chapter:

> Is the provision of observability a requirement for the effective exercise of social control?
>
> Does the degree to which communicative contacts permeate a group bear a relationship to the extent of normative, cultural, or functional integration?

The final chapter turns to these more general questions.

The Data

More specifically, this study examines selected mechanisms provided by twelve elementary and eight high schools to invite parental involvement in, knowledge about, and support of the schools. It will then analyze the extent to which provision of these mechanisms is related to the degree of involvement, knowledge, and support among 1,392 mothers of first-, fifth-, and tenth-grade children in these schools.

The data for this investigation were collected in the Spring of 1965 as part of a larger study which was concerned with the general problem of home-school relationships.[41] A major aim of the original study was to identify the structural features of communities which might affect such relationships. That is, are there differences in the way in which people in contrasting community settings react to the schools which their children are attending? Are school goals and practices colored by such characteristics of local communities as the composition of the labor force, size, commutation rate, or educational level?

These concerns dictated a sampling technique somewhat different from that of the usual survey. Eight communities in New Jersey were chosen, each representing an "ideal-type" in terms of relevant characteristics.[42] The communities included one rural village, two small towns (one middle-class and one working-class), four suburbs (two relatively stable and two rapidly growing with each pair including a middle- and a working-class suburb), and one medium-sized city. All communities were located near New York City.[43]

Eleven school-attendance areas were selected for the study, one in each of the seven smaller communities, and four in the city. The city-attendance areas included a middle-class, a white working-class, a racially mixed, and a Negro neighborhood. The communities, their nature, and their size are as follows:

Name of Community[a]	Composition	Population Size[b]
1) Metropolis	Medium-sized city	100,000
2) Suburban Estates	Stable, middle-class suburb	18,000
3) Nouveau Heights	Growing, middle-class suburb	23,000
4) Old Home	Stable, working-class suburb	30,000
5) New Home	Growing, working-class suburb	23,000
6) Resort Town	Middle-class small town	4,000
7) Working Town	Working-class small town	6,000
8) Green Hollow	Rural village	2,500

[a] Pseudonyms have been provided for all the communities

[b] The 1960 population of these communities has been rounded off to provide further anonymity for the communities.

One elementary and one high school were selected from each attendance area.[44] In these schools two first-grade, two fifth-grade, and two tenth-grade English classes were chosen. It was proposed to interview all mothers[45] of the students in these classes, all teachers in each elementary school, and all English teachers in each high school. The principals of every school were also to be interviewed, as were the students in the tenth-grade English classes. As can be seen in Table I.1, interviews were completed for all principals, for all but four students, and for all but one teacher. (The students with whom interviews were not completed were absent during the interviewing period, while one teacher of the 283 refused to participate in the study.)

There was an average response rate of 83% for mothers, varying from 91% of the mothers in the village of Green Hollow to 67% of the mothers in the Negro city school. Interviews were completed with 88% of the mothers in middle-class attendance areas but with only 76% of those in working-class areas.[46]

TABLE I.1

INTERVIEW RESPONSE RATES BY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AREAS

Attendance area	Mothers		Teachers[b]		Students		Principals	
	Number assigned[a]	Per cent inter-viewed	Number assigned	Per cent inter-viewed	Number assigned	Per cent inter-viewed	Number assigned	Per cent inter-viewed
Green Hollow	139	91%	19	100%	50	98%	2	100%
Working Town	169	75	30	100	56	100	2	100
Resort Town	173	90	23	100	45	100	2	100
New Home	173	82	48	100	45	100	2	100
Old Home	145	78	25	100	48	100	3	100
Nouveau Heights	146	88	31	100	49	98	2	100
Suburban Estates	146	90	22	100	60	98	2	100
Metropolis High School	170	82	30	97	169	93	1	100
Metropolis Elementary								
White, middle-class	108	85	13	100	---	---	1	100
White, working-class	112	82	9	100	---	---	1	100
Mixed	105	80	18	100	---	---	1	100
Negro	97	67	16	100	---	---	1	100
Total	(1683)	83%	(284)	99%	(522)	97%	(20)	100%

---

[a] Assigned on the basis of actual number of children in the sample classes.

[b] All sample class teachers, all English teachers in the high school, and all first- through sixth-grade teachers in the elementary school.

The data for this monograph are drawn almost entirely from the interview schedules which were administered to the 1,392 mothers, with occasional reference to the responses of teachers and principals.

CHAPTER I

FOOTNOTES

[1] T. Parsons and E. Shils (eds.), Toward a General Theory of Action (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 197.

[2] W.S. Landecker, "Types of Integration and Their Measurement," The Language of Social Research, ed. P.F. Lazarsfeld and M. Rosenberg (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1955), p. 19.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 20

[4] Landecker discusses the question of cultural integration on the societal level and, in the language of the cultural anthropologist, assumes that the various norms governing human behavior may form a more or a less integrated cultural configuration. He neglects what might be said to constitute a subtype of cultural integration, namely, the degree of consensus among members of a system about common goals and standards of behavior.

[5] Thus the code of ethics of the legal profession may differ from that of the garment industry, but the two sets of standards do not clash because each refers to situations which do not exist in the other profession.

[6] Landecker, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

[7] R.K. Merton, "Intermarriage and the Social Structure: Fact and Theory," Psychiatry, IV (August, 1941), pp. 361-74.

[8] R.K. Merton, "Conformity, Deviation, and Opportunity Structures," American Sociological Review, XXIV (April, 1959), pp. 177-89.

[9] Landecker, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

[11] C. Barnard, The Functions of the Executive (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1938), p. 91.

[12] K. Wolff (ed. and trans.), The Sociology of Georg Simmel (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), p. 307.

[13] H. Hyman and P. Sheatsley, "Some Reasons Why Information Campaigns Fail," *Readings in Social Psychology*, ed. E. Maccoby, T. Newcomb, and E. Hartley (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1958), pp. 164-74.

[14] A recent and comprehensive review of the literature in this field is provided by Harold Guetzkow, "Communication in Organizations," *Handbook of Organizations*, ed. J.G. March (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1965), pp. 534-573.

[15] R.K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1957), esp. pp. 319-22, 336-57, 374-77.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 319.

[17] Merton uses the terms visibility and observability synonymously in the discussion cited above. In subsequent lectures, however, he distinguishes between visibility as a property of an *item* (a norm or role performance) and observability as a property of a *status*. Thus, visibility refers to the extent to which norms or role-performances can *be seen*; observability to the extent to which people who are located in differing social positions *have access to information* about selected aspects of the group. Our specific research problem focuses on *observability*. In presenting Merton's discussion, however, we shall equate the two terms using the hyphenated form, observability-visibility.

[18] Other properties suggested as relevant by Merton are the duration of the group, size of the group, degree of social differentiation, types, and degrees of social cohesion, etc. See *ibid.*, pp. 310-326.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 326.

[20] T. Newcomb, *Personality and Social Change* (New York: Dryden Press, 1957), chap. 13.

[21] *Ibid.*, chap. 13.

[22] Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structures*, pp. 247-8 (emphases mine).

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 341

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 376.

[25] P. Blau, *The Dynamics of Bureaucracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955).

[26] We are now dropping the hyphenated term observability-visibility and dealing only with observability, or socially-structured

access to information. It may be noted here that as a corollary to the proposition that observability is a functional requirement for the exercise of social control, Merton says that some measure of insulation from total observability is also a requirement of groups. He suggests:

> There is some optimum of observability, difficult as yet to identify in measurable terms and doubtless varying for different social statuses, which will simultaneously make for accountability of role-performance and autonomy of role performance (ibid., p. 376).

See also Simmel's discussion of the "need for privacy" (in Wolff, op. cit.); R. Coser, "Insultation from Observability and Types of Social Conformity," American Sociological Review, XXV (February, 1961), pp. 28-39; L. Schneider, "The Role of the Category of Ignorance in Sociological Theory," American Sociological Review, XXVII (August, 1962), pp. 492-508; E. Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (New York: Anchor Books, 1959); W. Moore and M. Tumin, "Some Social Functions of Ignorance," American Sociological Review, XIV (December, 1949), pp. 787-95. All focus on the functions for the individual or the group of insulation from ready observation by others.

[27] While these two problems are not synonymous, they are analogous in that they both suggest the importance of an effective communication system for the maintenance of system integration.

[28] Landecker, op. cit., p. 23.

[29] Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure, p. 341.

[30] Ibid., p. 346.

[31] To determine the extent to which the provision of observability arrangements is a requirement for the effective exercise of social control would be far too complex a problem to investigate systematically in light of the limitations of available data. In the last two chapters, however, we will present some data which suggest that the provision of observability for a group of clients may have positive consequences for an organization.

[32] E.C. Bolmeier, "More About Education Is Needed," Educational Forum (January, 1950), pp. 195-6.

[33] R.F. Carter and J. Sutthoff, Communities and Their Schools (Stanford, California: Stanford University, 1960), pp. 1-2.

[34] Minutes of the Board of Education of the City of New York, Regular meeting, December 21, 1966.

[35] Only recently in one of the Harlem schools debate raged fiercely as to whether parents should play a role in the appointment of a principal.

[36] For a summary of many of these see National Educational Association Research Division, Public Opinion Polls on American Education (Washington: National Education Association, 1958).

[37] Bolmeier, op. cit., p. 197.

[38] T. Morris, "What Your Child's Teacher Thinks of You," Redbook (October, 1962).

[39] C. Glock, G. Selznick, and J. Spaeth, The Apathetic Majority (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), chap. 2.

[40] M. Janowitz, D. Wright, and W. Delaney, Public Administration and the Public: Perspectives Toward Government in a Metropolitan Community (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1958).

[41] The study was initiated at the request of the New Jersey State Department of Education which was interested in assessing community reactions to schools in the state.

[42] The process by which the relevant characteristics were operationalized for the purpose of selecting the communities for the study is described in D.E. Wilder and N.S. Friedman, "Selecting Ideal-Typical Communities and Gaining Access to Their Schools for Social Research Processes," New Jersey Project Memorandum # 1, October, 1965.

[43] The area within which the communities were selected was restricted to include only those New Jersey counties which lay within a 75-mile radius of central New York City. This decision was simply a matter of convenience so that no trip to a community would take more than two hours. Of the 21 countries in New Jersey, nine were immediately eliminated on this basis.

[44] Metropolis is served by one large comprehensive high school which draws its students from the entire city, including the four neighborhoods described above.

[45] Budgetary considerations made it impossible to interview fathers as well as mothers. It was felt, however, that mothers generally play the major role insofar as home-school relationships are concerned.

[46] A comparison of respondents and non-respondents with respect to selected characteristics (data for the non-respondents were obtained from their childrens' record cards) indicate that there are no significant differences between the two groups which might lead us to suspect the validity of our findings.

CHAPTER II

THE IDENTIFICATION AND LOCATION OF OPPORTUNITY-STRUCTURES FOR PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE OF SCHOOLS

In the preceding chapter it was stated that in order for people or organizations to engage in any kind of interaction, they must first know something about one another. Both individuals and groups provide bases for making their norms and role performances visible to significant others. Sometimes these arrangements are deliberately instituted for the purpose of providing ready access to such information, and sometimes the provision of this information is an unplanned by-product of group structure and process. This chapter examines some of the arrangements that have been provided in schools for parents to obtain information regarding school matters, and then locates these arrangements within the various schools in our sample.

To focus on school-structured arrangements for parents to gain information about what is going on in the schools does not imply that such information comes only through these arrangements -- for example, PTA's. Some parents never attend a PTA meeting and are nevertheless well-informed. Their source of information may be the local newspaper or even local "gossip." Bits of information may be transmitted over the morning cup of coffee with a neighbor. The child's response to "what did you do in school today?" is often confined to a bored "nothing!" For the parent who knows how to ask the right questions, however, the child may supply much information on school matters.[1] Many aspects of the school may become known to parents through their relationship with educational personnel. Being the wife or cousin of the local school principal, having a teacher as a close friend or neighbor, or being a member of the same lodge as a school board official, all increase the likelihood of becoming informed about school matters.

Thus, parents can obviously obtain information of certain kinds about the schools their children attend from a variety of sources other than those provided by the school. Still both parents and educational personnel suggest and several studies show that school-sponsored activities, through which parents are brought into direct contact with the school, can serve as effective instruments for increasing parental knowledge about school matters. A high school administrator states:

> Open houses, parent nights, and school programs which bring the parents into the school offer opportunity for the public to learn at first hand what is being taught in the schools.[2]

A parent has this to say:

> Every time I have gone to school I've got the information I wanted. . . . I've found that when parent and teacher sit down and talk . . . we are able to accomplish something. . . .[3]

The satisfaction expressed by this parent after his direct contact with the school or a teacher, concurs with the finding that "adults who have had direct contact with a teacher or a principal of a local public school are less critical of the public schools in general than are adults who have had no such contacts."[4] Similarly, in a study of over 700 parents of school children in a midwestern community, Bullock concludes that "non-approvers of the educational program tend also to be non-attenders at PTA."[5]

Educational administrators have attempted to increase parental knowledge of school programs through many and varied arrangements. In their study of the effectiveness of certain school-community linkages, Litwak and Meyer list a number of "linking mechanisms" employed in the Detroit public schools. Several of these schools, which were part of the Detroit Great Cities Program,[6] sent a special agent into the community to visit parents, acquaint them with the school's program and activities, and urge them to visit the school. Other schools extended the channels of communication into the community through home visits by teachers or principal. Voluntary associations, such as the PTA or Home-School Association, Open School Week, Parent-Teacher Conferences, bulletins, newsletters, or notes sent home with children were other arrangements reported by Litwak and Meyer,[7] which served as linkages between the schools and their parent-clients.

The 20 schools in our sample also employed a number of arrangements designed to keep parents informed about school matters. The present analysis focusses on the extent to which certain arrangements, when utilized by parents, are related to parental knowledge about the school. For this reason, it was decided to include in the analysis only those arrangements for which the rates of utilization by mothers could be ascertained. For example, four principals reported that an annual Open School Week[8] was held in their schools, but since our interviews did not ask whether mothers attended these occasions, this is omitted from the investigation. Another school sponsored a series of luncheons for mothers and teachers during the school year, but we collected no data on mothers' attendance at these gatherings. Several schools published bulletins or newsletters for parents but whether these reached the home and were read by mothers, or ended unread in a wastebasket, was not determined in the interview.[9]

Information was obtained on rates of utilization by mothers of three distinct arrangements: PTA or Home-School Organization, "Back-to-School Night" or "Open House Night," and "School Scheduled Conferences for All Parents."

The range of contact with the school reported by mothers in the sample extends far beyond the utilization of these three arrangements. Many mothers have had casual contact with the child's teacher, have spoken with other school personnel such as the principal, librarian, or nurse, or have called their child's teacher for a private conference. Most mothers have also spoken with their child or other parents about school matters and some have friends who are teachers. These all represent channels for obtaining information about school matters and a later chapter examines the relationship between utilization of these "informal" channels and parental knowledge about the school.

As noted in Chapter I, however, our primary concern is with those arrangements which schools have instituted in order to raise the levels of parental participation, knowledge, and support. Our argument, is as follows:

Previous studies of parental participation in school matters and knowledge about them are few, but they all find that such participation and knowledge are substantially higher for middle- than for working-class parents. These differences have usually been attributed to the general lack of interest or apathy of the working-class parent, or to his discomfort in talking with middle-class school personnel, or in attending PTA meetings (the sole indicator of parental "contact" with the school in most previous studies) which are oriented toward the middle-class. We suspect, however, that class differences in parental participation in schools and knowledge about them may stem from the fact that the sources through which parents can obtain information about school matters are not themselves randomly distributed within any given population.

> Not everyone in the community has the same opportunity to come into contact with school affairs. Concern about community affairs in general and education in particular . . . is more relevant to the interests and values of those in the middle or upper socioeconomic level than of those in the lower. Not only are those with higher occupational status, more education, and higher incomes likelier to come into contact with school personnel through community participation, they are likelier to meet them in informal situations. Businessmen who lunch with the school superintendent or school board member at the service club meeting may also live in the same neighborhood with him. Those with more formal education, furthermore, are familiar with the language of education and, therefore, at ease in talking with school personnel. Those with less education may find communication blocked and themselves ill at ease in relationships with school personnel.[10]

Furthermore the middle-class mother may be more skillful than her working-class counterpart at eliciting information from her child; she is perhaps more often available to pick her child up at school in the afternoon and to engage in casual coversation with teachers or other school personnel. Thus if schools do not institute formal arrangements to bring mothers within their orbit, traditional socio-economic differences in parental knowledge may be expected to persist.

Many schools do make provisions for mothers to become involved in school matters and knowledgeable about them. What has never been investigated, however, is the extent to which such arrangements are themselves differentially distributed according to the predominant socio-economic level of the parents of children in the school. Nor do we have any information about the extent to which the provision of such arrangements for working-class parents serves to modify traditional differences in parental knowledge stemming from differential location in the system of stratification.

Our information about mothers' utilization of three such arrangements (PTA, Back-to-School Night, and School-Scheduled Conferences for All Parents) enables us to find out how these are distributed among the twenty schools in the sample. As we shall see, all the schools provide at least one of these arrangements through which mothers may become involved in school matters, but only a few have instituted all three arrangements.

The rest of this chapter describes these three arrangements and their location, either singly or in combination, in the sample of schools. It will turn out that there are patterned differences between the types of schools in which these arrangements appear singly and those in which they appear in combination. These differences are presented and discussed later in this chapter.

Parent-Teacher Association

All except one high school and one elementary school of the twenty schools in the sample have either a PTA or a Home-School Organization. The Home-School Organization differs from the PTA in only one respect: it is not officially affiliated with the National Congress of Parents and Teachers which, in 1966, claimed over twelve million members organized in approximately 40,000 local associations.[11]

The typical PTA holds monthly meetings at which guest speakers discuss topics of current educational interest, and raises funds for special school equipment such as audio-visual aids, uniforms for the baseball team, or books for the library. It is practically universal among American schools. In a recent survey of 2,400 elementary school principals, 97% of the principals reported that their schools have some kind of PTA or parents' organization.[12]

Some sociologists have accounted for the ubiquity of the PTA by citing its role in reducing potential conflict between parents and the school. As service organizations, schools face the problem of maintaining parent interest, commitment, and support. At the same time they must preserve some degree of "distance" between parents and the school in order to provide latitude for decision-making by educational personnel and to maintain professional autonomy. Bidwell suggests that

> school-dominated parent associations, like the PTA . . . are means of channeling parent pressures in organizationally acceptable ways, while maintaining parent involvement and adequate school-parent communication.[13]

In the same vein Sykes maintains that while the National Congress is explicitly defined as an organization of parents, teachers, and other citizens who are interested in the welfare, education, and protection of children and youth,[14] the PTA has a "more or less unintended social function of equal importance for the community, namely the reduction of parent-teacher conflict."[15] Sykes states that new methods of teaching introduced into the schools since parents were themselves in school, differences in values between home and school, the universalistic orientation of the bureaucratically organized school, and the derogatory stereotyping of teachers which is prevalent in our society, all serve as potential sources of conflict between parents and teachers. He suggests that

> 'instruction' of parents by lectures and discussion groups which convey the school-approved version of modern theories of child psychology, education, and 'group relations'; the symbolic affirmation of the school's objectives in programs involving the joint participation of parents and teachers; and the provision of opportunities for parents and teachers to associate outside the institutional relationship: all serve to attack the sources of parent-teacher conflict. . . .[16]

That satisfaction with the PTA is a component of the general satisfaction with the school among mothers in the sample is shown in Table II.1. Seventy-one per cent of the mothers who feel that the PTA is doing an excellent job report that they are very satisfied with the school in general, but only 47% of the mothers in schools with no PTA, and only 36% of those who think their PTA is doing only a fair or poor job, are very satisfied with the child's school. The figures suggest that general satisfaction is more readily maintained in a school with no PTA than in one in which the PTA fails to meet parental standards and expectations. While both evaluation of the PTA and expressed satisfaction with the school may reflect a prevalently favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the school, Table II.1 shows that a

TABLE II.1

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO ARE "VERY SATISFIED" WITH THE SCHOOL BY EVALUATION OF JOB THE PTA IS DOING

Evaluation of PTA	Per cent very satisfied with school	Number of mothers
Excellent	71%	(167)
Good	56	(559)
Fair or poor	36	(251)
No PTA	47	(315)
All mothers	(53%)	(1292)

negative evaluation of the effectiveness of the PTA is seldom associated with a high level of satisfaction with the school.

We have suggested that PTA is one of several arrangements through which schools may increase the level of parental knowledge of school matters. Do the principals and teachers in the sample see their PTA as an organization which performs this function? One principal had this to say when asked about the activities of the PTA in his school:

> The PTA sponsors meetings at which different facilities and personnel of the school are introduced to parents.

A high school teacher said:

> The PTA here tries to acquaint parent with the school and make them more aware of what the school is doing for their children. It keeps parents alert to the aims of the high school and some of its needs.

One teacher summed up the PTA's role as a knowledge-producing arrangement for parents when she said:

> [The PTA's] theme this year was 'Getting to Know You.' Speakers were brought in to bring knowledge to the parents.

Responses such as these suggest that PTA's are designed as organizations to promote opportunities for parents to obtain knowledge regarding school matters.

The PTA's in our sample differed, however, not only in the range of activities they sponsored, but also in the effectiveness of their fund-raising, educational, or social programs. On the basis of a qualitative analysis of the evaluations of their PTA's by principals, teachers, and mothers, the 18 PTA's could be classified as either "active" or "inactive."[17] A PTA classified as "active" was described by the school principal and a teacher as follows:

> PTA here does everything . . . social, fund-raising to help children get extras . . . programming . . . supporting bond issues . . . excellent, unusual, original. . . .

A teacher had this to say of a PTA which was classified as "inactive."

> They bought a backstop for the baseball team . . . I can't think of anything else because they don't do very much. . . .

The PTA then is one arrangement instituted by the schools in our sample for providing parents with an opportunity to obtain information about school matters.

Back-to-School Night

Another such arrangement, provided by all but 3 schools, is the Back-to-School Night or Open House Program. Campbell and Ramseyer describe the Back-to-School Night:

> After a brief orientation meeting of all parents, the grownups then run through the schedules of their children with each class period being shortened to about fifteen minutes. This plan allows parents to meet each teacher of their children, to hear briefly from each teacher regarding the work being done in the class, and to raise a few questions regarding school procedures.[18]

In the words of one administrator:

> In this school there is a certain encouragement given to the parents to establish . . . a relationship through the Open House Program. It offers the first opportunity for parents to come in without it seeming to be a case of settling an individual problem, and it establishes a contact.[19]

Although Campbell and Ramseyer describe the Back-to-School Night as "an elaborate plan . . . often used by high schools . . . ," all but two of the elementary schools in our sample also held such an evening for parents. The usual Back-to-School Night in elementary schools also involved a brief orientation session, after which parents were invited to their child's classroom to meet the teacher and learn first-hand about the curriculum, teaching materials and philosophy that would guide their child's work during the year.[20] At the same time parents were provided with an opportunity to see their child's work displayed on classroom bulletin boards and to ask questions of a general nature.

The Back-to-School Night, usually held shortly after the opening of the school year, is an arrangement provided by most of the schools in our sample, for parents to acquaint themselves with the school, to meet school personnel, and to obtain first-hand information about school matters. Accordingly, schools were assigned a score of 1 if a Back-to-School was held, and a score of 0 if no such arrangement was provided (see Table II.2).

Scheduled Conferences

Most of the notices sent to parents urging them to attend the Back-to-School Night provided a caution such as the following:

> We regret that time will not allow for any private conferences during this evening. However, our teachers are always

> happy to arrange an appointment, by telephone, for any parent wishing to discuss a personal problem.[21]

Some schools, aware that many parents will not take the initiative to arrange a private conference with the child's teacher, have institutionalized such an arrangement in the form of "Scheduled Conferences for All Parents." Eight of the twelve elementary schools, but none of the high schools in the sample, provided such an opportunity for parents to confer with the teacher.

As in the case of the Back-to-School Night, parents are invited to the school -- usually these conferences are held in the evening so that fathers may attend -- and are allotted about fifteen minutes to ask questions regarding the curriculum, home work, the marking system, tests, etc.[22] These conferences are usually held on several successive evenings to insure sufficient time for parent and teacher to discuss these matters of mutual concern.

That the scheduled conference turns up only in elementary schools (see Table II.2) may be an artifact of the size of schools. Most of the high schools in our sample are considerably larger than the elementary schools, with from 650 to more than 3,500 students. For even the smallest of these high schools to arrange for parents to confer privately with each of the child's five to ten teachers, would constitute a strain on school facilities and personnel[23] and on the parents.

The size of an organization, or of the client body it is attempting to reach, may affect the kinds of arrangements through which it makes itself visible to its clients. Only two elementary schools, Metropolis # 1 and New Home, were larger than the smallest high school and Table II.2 shows that the former did not hold scheduled conferences, while the latter held them only for parents of first- to fourth-grade children. Merton suggests that differences in observability

> . . . are not merely givens or 'happenstances'; they are results of functional requirements being met by the structure of the group and by norms which support this structure.[24]

That the norms do not support the mechanism of the scheduled conference for high school parents to the same extent that they do for elementary school parents is suggested by the fact that only 58% of the high school teachers and 63% of high school mothers, but 84% of elementary school teachers and 75% of elementary school mothers agree that "each parent should have at least one private conference a year with his child's teacher(s)." As in the case of the Back-to-School Night, schools were assigned a score of 1 if they held scheduled conferences and a score of 0 if no such arrangement was provided.

The Index of Observability

We have described three arrangements instituted by the schools in our sample to attract parents to the school and to acquaint them with school personnel, goals and practices. As Table II.2 shows, all schools have provided at least one of these arrangements, with others having two or all three of them. These arrangements, in combination, represent the extent to which the school provides ready opportunity for parents to obtain knowledge regarding the norms and role-performance of school personnel. Thus they are taken here to constitute a measure of "observability" or the "readiness of access to information about the norms and values prevailing in the [school]."[25] By adding the schools'

TABLE II.2

OBSERVABILITY SCORES AND RATINGS OF SCHOOLS

Schools[a]	Back-to-School Night	Scheduled Conferences	PTA	Total Score	Rating on Index
Metropolis					
High School	1	0	1	2	Low
Elementary # 1	1	0	2	3	High
Elementary # 2	0	1	1	2	Low
Elementary # 3	1	1	0	2	Low
Elementary # 4	1	0	1	2	Low
Suburban Estates					
High School	1	0	2	3	High
Elementary School	1	1	2	4	High
Nouveau Heights					
High School	1	0	2	3	High
Elementary School	1	1	2	4	High
Old Home					
High School	1	0	1	2	Low
Elementary # 1	1	1	2	4	High
Elementary # 2	1	0	2	3	High
New Home					
High School	1	0	0	1	Low
Elementary School	1	.5[b]	1	2.5	Low
Resort Town					
High School	1	0	1	2	Low
Elementary School	1	0	1	2	Low
Working Town					
High School	1	0	1	2	Low
Elementary School	1	1	2	4	High
Green Hollow					
High School	0	0	1	1	Low
Elementary School	0	1	1	2	Low

Scoring: 0 = None; 1 = Exists; 2 = Active PTA

[a] For description of attendance areas see Chapter I.

[b] For grades 1-4 only.

scores for each separate arrangement we obtain a summary score with a possible range of zero to four.[26] These summary scores are presented in the extreme right hand column of Table II.2; they represent the extent to which each school has provided opportunities for its parent-clients to obtain information about school matters. For purposes of analysis, schools with scores of 3 or 4 will be characterized as providing "high observability" for parents; those with scores below 3 will be said to rank "low" in the extent of observability provided for parents. The observability rating constitutes a global property of the school, and provides a context within which differences in parental contact with the school and knowledge about it may be analyzed.

Table II.2 shows that eight schools have received a rank of "high" and twelve a rank of "low" on the basis of their summary scores. Is it possible to discern any consistent pattern in the extent to which schools differ in the provision of observability for parents? What are some of the characteristics of the schools that are relatively generous in providing such arrangements? In what types of schools are these arrangements limited?

The rest of this chapter examines several attributes that distinguish schools differing in the extent to which they have structured opportunities for parent-clients to obtain information about educational goals and practices.

Observability by School Level

A casual inspection of Table II.2 is enough to find that more elementary than high schools rank high on the Index of Observability.

Table II.3 groups the data: two of the eight high schools, but six of the twelve elementary schools rank high on the Observability Index.

TABLE II.3

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS RANKING HIGH OR LOW ON THE INDEX OF OBSERVABILITY BY SCHOOL LEVEL

School level	Observability		Number of schools
	High	Low	
Elementary schools	6	6	12
High schools	2	6	8
All schools	8	12	20

School personnel frequently complain that high school parents have much less contact with the school than do elementary school parents. We suspect that this is precisely because high schools limit the opportunity for such parental contact.[28] The limitation by high schools of arrangements for parents to obtain information may reflect the difficulties encountered by these large schools in handling an influx of parents on a regular basis.

The constraint which the size of an organization may have on the kinds of arrangements through which it makes itself visible to its clients was reflected in the fact that no high schools or large elementary schools held scheduled conferences for all parents. While the size of the school or of its parent body may render certain arrangements less workable, however, it may also be that a lack of normative support of such arrangements contributes to the low observability ratings of most high schools. Thus high school administrators may limit such arrangements because they feel that high school parents are less concerned about school affairs.[29] Our data indicate, however, that school personnel may be misperceiving the relative interest of high school and elementary school mothers in school matters, for about the same proportion of high school and elementary school mothers report that they are "very interested" in school affairs (66% of the former and 69% of the latter).

If high school mothers are as often interested as elementary school mothers, in school matters, high schools may be performing a disservice to themselves, as well as to parents, by limiting the opportunities for parents to be drawn into the school's orbit.

It is perhaps significant that fewer high school than elementary school mothers report that they are "very satisfied" with their child's school (46% of the former, but 55% of the latter). If school administrators feel that improving home-school relations may be accomplished by creating a more informed parent body, they might do well to increase opportunities for high school parents to visit the school.[30]

The communities which were studied were selected on the basis of ecological criteria. The sample design therefore permits us to examine school-provided opportunities for parental knowledge within different community settings. We look first at the distribution of these opportunity-structures by size of community and then by the predominant socio-economic level of the community.

Observability by Community Type

Almost 30 years ago, Waller argued that "environmental openness of schools pervasively affects their structures and activities."[31] A growing literature suggests that school systems are markedly affected by the characteristics of the communities they serve. Thus the problem of presenting itself to the community may differ greatly between the school in a small town or rural village and the suburban or metropolitan school. In the former, the school system is apt to be a community institution, symbolizing community identity and values, and providing the major focus for the integration of community life. Vidich and Bensman, for example, describe Springdale's school as one whose

> . . . budget of a quarter of a million dollars makes the school the major industry of the village, a major purchaser of goods and services and the source of a substantial section of purchasing power. . . . Most of the major social, cultural and athletic events of the community take place within its halls.[32]

This suggests that, just as in the family or small informal group, there is less need for the small town or village school to provide formal mechanisms or devices for parental knowledge. It is rather in the large suburban or metropolitan communities, where the school is but one of many formal organizations competing for the attention of residents, that schools may self-consciously have to institute certain arrangements to attract parents and to enlist their interest and support.

Our data confirm the suggestion that small town or rural village schools have less need (or perhaps feel that they have less need) of formal observability devices.[33] Only one of the six small town or village schools ranks high on the Observability Index. Conversely, six of the nine suburban schools have high observability ratings. Contrary to our expectations, however, with the exception of the white, middle-class school, none of the schools in Metropolis provides extensive formal opportunity for parental knowledge.[34]

TABLE II.4

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS RANKING HIGH OR LOW ON THE OBSERVABILITY INDEX BY COMMUNITY TYPE

Community Type	Observability		Number of Schools
	High	Low	
City	1	4	5
Suburbs	6	3	9
Small Towns	1	3	4
Rural Community	0	2	2
Total	8	12	20

Table II.4 indicates that observability is clearly a suburban phenomenon.[35] Sociologists have suggested that there may be a selective migration to suburbs of individuals who place particular emphasis on the importance of the school and of a "good education" in the process of upward mobility. It may be, then, that administrators of suburban schools are responding to demands of suburban parents for more contact with the schools and knowledge about them.

We have several indirect indicators of parental concern with the importance of education: self-reported interest in school matters, agreement that "a young man must do well in school in order to get ahead" and that it is important for parents to confer privately with the teacher at least once during the school year. A comparison of the responses of suburban and non-suburban mothers to these three questions (Table II.5) shows that there is no difference between suburban and non-suburban mothers insofar as their interest and stress upon educational matters are concerned.

TABLE II.5

INTEREST AND CONCERN REGARDING SCHOOL MATTERS
OF SUBURBAN AND NON-SUBURBAN MOTHERS

Type	"Very Interested"	Should Have Private Conference	"Young Man Must Do Well"	Number of Mothers
Suburban Mothers	69%	69%	91%	(512)
Non-Suburban Mothers	75	72	95	(879)

It appears then, that non-suburban administrators are responding less frequently to the normative requirements of their constituents. Perhaps the parents in these areas are not as vocal as suburban mothers in apprising school personnel of their interest and concern.[36] In any event, suburban administrators are providing parents with more extensive opportunities for obtaining knowledge about the schools; we shall see later, that although suburban mothers express no more concern about educational matters than do their non-suburban counterparts, they utilize these school-structured arrangements more extensively than do non-suburban mothers.

Observability by Community Socio-Economic Composition

One of the primary criteria for selecting communities for the study was that of the predominant social-class affiliation of residents. Rogoff suggests that the community's stratification structure

> . . . may set in motion both formal arrangements -- such as school, library, and general cultural facilities in the community -- and informal mechanisms such as normative climates

> or modal levels of aspiration which are likely to affect all members of the community to some extent.[37]

Although Rogoff's concern is the effect of middle- as compared to working-class community climates on mobility, it might also be that higher levels of aspiration and a stronger emphasis on the value of education in the middle-class community provide normative support for extensive school-structured channels of communication between home and school.

TABLE II.6

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS RANKING HIGH OR LOW ON THE INDEX OF OBSERVABILITY BY PREDOMINANT SOCIO-ECONOMIC LEVEL OF THE ATTENDANCE AREA[38]

Socio-Economic Level*	Observability		Number of Schools
	High	Low	
Middle-class	5	2	7
Working-class	3	7	10
All schools	8	9	17

*The rural schools and Metropolis High School, which are socio-economically heterogeneous, are excluded.

Table II.6 indicates that schools in middle-class communities generally do rank high, while those in working-class areas tend to rank low, on the Observability Index. Five of the seven middle-class schools, but only three of the ten working-class schools, are high on the Index. As is well-known, schools in middle-class communities have more favorable pupil-teacher ratios, better library facilities, and higher per capita expenditures on teachers' salaries, textbooks, and equipment than schools in working-class areas. In her study of the schools of a midwestern city Sexton concluded that

> . . . school buildings, and the facilities they contain, are much less adequate in lower-income than in upper-income areas.[39]

All school buildings in the city which Sexton studied were rated on the basis of a series of criteria such as age, safety, healthfulness, adequacy of facilities, and appearance. On all of these criteria, the schools servicing the lower-income neighborhoods ranked below those schools whose students were drawn from the upper-income neighborhoods.[40]

Apparently, school-structured opportunity for parental knowledge is still another item that is differentially distributed on the basis of the socio-economic level of the school's clients, to the advantage of the middle-class parent.

Summary

We have identified three devices or arrangements which the schools in the sample have instituted, either singly or in combination, in order to increase the visibility of their programs and practices and to enlist parental support. These arrangements are especially prevalent in elementary schools, suburban schools, and schools located in middle-class communities. This finding led us to suggest that the size of an organization, or of the public which it is attempting to reach, may exercise a constraint on the kinds of arrangements through which it makes itself visible. We also suggested that formal arrangements for the promotion of visibility are less necessary for schools which are located in small communities, where informal networks of relationships among parents, or between parents and educational personnel, may serve as alternative channels for parental knowledge about the school. And finally, it was noted that the successful institutionalization of these organizationally-structured arrangements may depend to a large extent on the normative support afforded them -- actual or perceived -- by organizational members and non-members. It has usually been assumed, and school personnel in our sample seem to agree, that such support is more characteristic of elementary than of high school parents, more prevalent in the suburbs than in the city, town, or village, and stronger in middle- than in working-class areas.

However, "opportunity for exposure to an event does not automatically lead to actual exposure."[41] Similarly, the provision of opportunities for parental knowledge about the schools is no guarantee of the utilization of these opportunities. The next chapter therefore examines the extent to which mothers of schoolchildren actually utilize the opportunities provided by the schools. Utilization rates will be examined for the sample as a whole, and differences will be analyzed within selected school, community, and observability settings.

CHAPTER II

FOOTNOTES

[1] Teachers and other staff in the school have often noted that the child may be a valuable informant. For example:

> It's very important that parents counsel with their children morning, noon and night as to what's going on in the school and form an attitude on how they feel things are going. (Lou Babcock and Arthur H. Rice, "What Parents Think About Schools and Teachers," The Nation's Schools [August, 1955], pp. 64-70.)

[2] W.L. Cooper, "Meeting Conflicting Demands on the High School," in The High School in a New Era (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 321.

[3] Babcock and Rice, op. cit., p. 64.

[4] J.M. Shipton, and E.L. Belisle, "Who Criticizes the Public Schools?" Phi Delta Kappan, XXXVII (April, 1956), p. 307.

[5] R.P. Bullock, School-Community Attitude Analysis for Educational Administrators (Columbus: College of Education, Ohio State University, 1959), p. 49. These statements are not evidence that contact with the school and knowledge about it result in a more satisfied parent. As we noted in Chapter I, however, the ideology of educational administrators assumes that parental satisfaction and support are by-products of such contact and knowledge. Chapters VIII and IX test this assumption.

[6] This Program will be described in great detail in a later chapter.

[7] E. Litwak, and H.J. Meyer, Relationship Between School-Community Coordinating Procedures and Reading Achievement, Bureau of Research, Office of Education, 1966.

[8] The writer, who was reared in the New York City public schools, and who vividly recalls the annual Open School Week, was surprised to find that this familiar institution appears to be on the wane. Only four of the twenty schools in the sample report holding an Open School Week, at which parents are invited to spend a few hours in the classroom

observing a "typical" school day. The fact that three of these four schools are located in middle-class communities suggests that the decline of the Open School Week may be a reflection of the higher employment rates today, as compared to thirty years ago, of mothers of school-age children. Critics of the Open School Week have argued that this arrangement does little to increase the visibility of the classroom behavior of teacher or students, since both teacher and students have prepared themselves carefully to "put their best foot forward" for the parents. On the other hand, one teacher asserts:

> Getting into the classroom to see for themselves what goes on is worth a dozen notes or conferences. . . .

For it provides the parents with

> . . . firsthand observation of the rewards and harassments of the teacher who must daily cope with an average class of 25 spirited young children (T. Morris, op. cit., p. 141).

[9] The present investigation stems from a larger study, the original title of which was "Consensus Between School and Community Regarding Educational Goals and Practices." In order to obtain a maximum of parallel data from mothers, teachers, and students for the analysis of consensus and accuracy of perception regarding school matters among the three status groups, it was necessary to eliminate a series of questions that would have provided more detailed information about mothers' utilization of a number of other school-structured arrangements.

[10] D. Westby-Gibson, Social Perspectives on Education: The Student, The School (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1965), p. 276.

[11] World Almanac (New York: Newspaper Enterprise Association, 1966), p. 507.

[12] The Elementary School Principalship, The National Elementary Principal, 37th Yearbook (September, 1958), p. 239.

[13] C.E. Bidwell, "The School As a Formal Organization," in J.G. March (ed.), Handbook of Organizations (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1965), p. 1011.

[14] National Congress of Parents and Teachers, Parent-Teacher Manual, 1950-1953 (Chicago: National Congress of Parents and Teachers, 1952), p. 2.

[15] Sykes, G.M., "The PTA and Parent-Teacher Conflict," Harvard Educational Review (Spring, 1953), p. 87.

[16] Ibid., p. 90.

[17] This differentiation was preliminary to the assignment of a score to each school in the sample based on the existence of, or range of activities of, its PTA. Schools with an active PTA were assigned a score of 2 for this item; those with inactive PTA's a score of 1, and those with no PTA a score of 0 for this item. (See Table II.2.)

[18] R.F. Campbell, and J.A. Ramseyer, The Dynamics of School-Community Relationships (New York: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1955), p. 176.

[19] Babcock and Rice, op. cit., pp. 64-5.

[20] "New Home" Across the Board, Vol. XVIII (October 30, 1963), p. 1 (local school newsletter).

[21] Notice to parents from "Suburban Estates" Junior High School.

[22] Teachers were cautioned against discussing marks or the marking system during the Back-to-School Night, and were advised that "this is a matter for individual interviews." (Bulletin to teachers regarding Back-to-School Night from "Suburban Estates" Elementary School.)

[23] While an elementary school teacher has an average of 25 students in his class, a high school teacher, with a schedule of five or six periods a day, may teach as many as 150 students.

[24] Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure, p. 346.

[25] Ibid., p. 337.

[26] A score of 4 was assigned to those schools which held both scheduled conferences and a Back-to-School Night and in which the PTA was "active."

[27] The lower ratings of the high schools is a reflection of the fact that no high schools held Scheduled Conferences.

[28] In Chapter III we present data which show that when high schools provide ready observability, high school mothers have about as much contact as elementary school mothers.

[29] Forty-five per cent of high school teachers, but 61% of elementary school teachers feel that the mothers of their students are "very concerned" about school matters.

[30] Chapter VIII examines the relationship between the school's observability score and the level of satisfaction of its parent-clients.

[31] Bidwell, op. cit., p. 1009.

[32] A.J. Vidich, and J. Bensman, Small Town in Mass Society (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1960), pp. 174-5.

[33] The principal of one of the small town elementary schools said, for example:

> This is a small town and . . . I'm closer to the people and situations than in a bigger town. . . .

It may also be significant that in Working Town and Green Hollow, the two smallest communities in the sample, about half the elementary and high school teachers reside within the community itself. Although a large proportion of teachers both live and teach in Metropolis, the relative anonymity of city life probably reduces the opportunities for informal interaction with parents that are likely to exist in the small town or village.

[34] Chapter IV presents data indicating that the limitation of these formal arrangements has differential consequences for the knowledge of mothers in small towns as compared to mothers in the city or suburbs. We show that these formal arrangements are requirements of schools in larger communities (if schools are seeking increased parental knowledge) since the level of knowledge will be found to be relatively high for mothers in those city and suburban schools where observability is high, but low in the city and suburban schools where observability is low.

[35] This is partially an artifact of the higher socio-economic level of suburban communities. Still, two of the five working-class suburban schools rank high on the Index of Observability.

[36] A slightly higher proportion of teachers in suburban than in non-suburban schools (62% of the former but 53% of the latter) feel that the mothers of their students are "very concerned" about school matters.

[37] N. Rogoff, "Local Social Structure and Educational Selection," Education, Economy, and Society, ed. by J. Floud Halsey and Anderson (New York: The Free Press, 1965), pp. 242-3.

[38] The attendance area, rather than the community, has been used as the unit of analysis in order to differentiate between the middle-class and the three working-class schools in Metropolis.

[39] F. Sexton, Education and Income (New York: Viking Press, 1961), p. 123.

[40] Ibid., pp. 124-132.

[41] Glock, et al., op. cit., p. 19.

CHAPTER III

THE UTILIZATION OF OPPORTUNITY-STRUCTURES FOR PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE IN SCHOOL SYSTEMS

It is by no means certain that the sheer existence of opportunities for observation of the school is associated with actual parental utilization of such opportunities, any more than publishing information regarding a particular event in a newspaper guarantees that the item will be widely read. School personnel and leaders of parent groups frequently complain about poor attendance at PTA meetings or at other school gatherings. In 1962, for example, Redbook magazine asked 400 teachers to grade parents on a series of items such as "Consideration," "Cooperation," "Responsibility," "Effort," and "Attendance." Thirty-four per cent of the teachers gave parents a "U" (Unsatisfactory) for attendance at school meetings -- the highest percentage of "U's" given for any item.[1] Similarly, Cloward and Jones report that only one of every four parents in their sample either belonged to the PTA or attended its meetings.[2]

Clearly, many parents do not utilize the various arrangements which schools provide for them. Some research has moved beyond this bare observation to report systematic variations in the extent to which opportunities for knowledge are utilized by parents. Most of this research has found socio-economic differences in parental participation in school matters. In her study of the elementary and high schools of a large midwestern city, Sexton reports that 74% of parents in the highest income group and only 10% in the lowest income group were members of the PTA.[3] She concludes:

> So it is that parents in upper-income groups have closest contact with the schools through parent organizations, while those in lower income groups usually have no contact all all. . . . Furthermore, upper-income parents frequently consult with teachers, counselors, the school principal, the superintendent and even school board members about their children and school affairs. Lower income parents seldom talk with any of these people.[4]

Herriott and St. John asked principals of schools to estimate the percentage of parents who attended "school events." Principals of high-SES schools estimated an attendance of 61%, and principals of the lowest SES schools 31%.[5] Cloward and Jones found that 42% of the middle-class parents in a depressed area either belonged to or attended the PTA; the corresponding percentages for working- and lower-class respondents were 34% and 16% respectively.[6] Foskett,[7] Carter,[8] and Litwak and Meyer[9] have also found that participation in school affairs is higher for middle- than for working-class parents.

Parental contact with the school has also been found to vary with the school level of the child. Sexton reports that 11% of the lower-income parents of elementary school children claim PTA membership, while the comparable figure for high school parents is 6%. Among parents of higher socio-economic status in Sexton's sample, 55% on the elementary, but 31% on the high school level, report that they are PTA members.[10] Similarly, Grobman reports on the findings of several of the Florida leadership project studies:

> . . . secondary schools are less close to their patrons than are elementary schools. There is less participation in P.T.A.;

> the parents interact with the school less frequently; there is less use of parents by the school.[11]

There is some evidence, too, that suburban parents participate more in school activities than do non-suburban parents. Martin suggests that

> . . . by and large the suburban family is oriented toward the public school: any number of observers have cited superior suburban schools as a prime reason for the exodus from the central city to the suburbs . . . the suburban public school is 'closer to the people' than its central-city counterpart, and . . . one might anticipate more active participation in school affairs by suburban school patrons than by those of the core city.[12]

Similarly, Fine comments that as compared to their urban counterparts, parents in the suburbs

> . . . through their Parent-Teachers Associations and 'citizens' committess, take more active part in the day-to-day operation of the schools.[13]

The previous literature dealing with parental attendance at school meetings seems to add weight to the conclusion that such attendance is higher for elementary than for high school parents, for suburban than for non-suburban parents, and for parents of higher than of lower socio-economic status. In the previous chapter, however, it was found that the distribution of school-structured observability arrangements varied substantially by school level, community type, and community SES. It is therefore possible that the higher participation rates of elementary school, suburban, and middle-class parents are an artifact of the differential distribution of observability arrangements to the advantage of these same parents. Can it be, when these arrangements are provided for high school, non-suburban, and working-class parents, that the utilization rates of these groups will approximate those of the traditionally higher-participating elementary school, suburban, and middle-class parents?

The rest of this chapter examines the extent to which the three observability arrangements are utilized, singly and in combination, by the mothers in the sample. We shall then analyze the utilization rates of mothers under varying conditions of observability to see the effects which the abundance or paucity of such arrangements have on the participation rates of mothers who are located in different school and community settings.

The Location of Utilizers and Non-Utilizers

Every mother was asked if she had utilized each of the three school-provided arrangements comprising the Index of Observability: the Back-to-School Night, the Scheduled Conference, and at least one PTA meeting.[14] Table III.1 shows the percentage of mothers in each school who reported making use of each arrangement. The percentages in the next to last row of Table III.1 show that, while only slightly more than half of all mothers took advantage of Back-to-School Night and PTA, more than four-fifths attended Scheduled Conferences.

The high attendance rates at Scheduled Conferences signals the qualitative differences among the three arrangements. In contrast to the PTA meeting or the Back-to-School Night, the Scheduled Conference affords mothers an opportunity to confer privately with the child's teacher. The mother is able to discuss matters or ask questions which pertain specifically to her child. The privacy of the Scheduled Conference may appeal to those parents who are ill-at-ease in the more social environment of the PTA or the Back-to-School Night.

TABLE III.1

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS UTILIZING EACH ARRANGEMENT BY SCHOOL

School	Observability Rating	Back-to-School Night	Scheduled Conferences	PTA	Number of Mothers
Suburban Estates High School	High	84%	*	86%	(51)
Suburban Estates Elementary School	High	81	95	96	(80)
Nouveau Heights High School	High	70	*	63	(37)
Nouveau Heights Elementary School	High	86	82	81	(90)
Working Town Elementary School	High	69	88	35	(81)
Old Home Elementary School # 1	High	77	87	66	(47)
Old Home Elementary School # 2	High	77	*	69	(30)
Metropolis Elementary School # 1	High	63	*	64	(92)
Working Town High School	Low	40	*	26	(43)
Old Home High School	Low	65	*	50	(34)
New Home High School	Low	34	*	*	(38)
New Home Elementary School	Low	68	30[15]	57	(104)
Resort Town High School	Low	54	*	49	(41)
Resort Town Elementary School	Low	74	*	53	(113)
Green Hollow High School	Low	*	*	22	(46)
Green Hollow Elementary School	Low	*	92	45	(80)
Metropolis High School	Low	17	*	10	(138)
Metropolis Elementary School # 2	Low	*	77	35	(82)
Metropolis Elementary School # 3	Low	26	69	*	(89)
Metropolis Elementary School # 4	Low	46	*	62	(66)
All Mothers		59%	83%	52%	(1392)
Range of Utilization		17-86%	69-95%	10-96%	

*Arrangement not provided.

Nor does the Scheduled Conference require the parent to take as much initiative as is involved in deciding whether to attend a PTA meeting or Back-to-School Night, for each parent is usually assigned a specific fifteen-minute to half-hour period with the teacher. For all these reasons, we will find that when this arrangement is offered, it is more widely utilized than the others, even by the traditionally non-participating parent (e.g. the working-class mother).

The percentages for all mothers obscure the wide range of differences in the utilization of these arrangements within the schools in the sample. Among all mothers, approximately 3 out of 5 attended Back-to-School Night. In Metropolis High School, however, less than one out of five attended this gathering, while in Nouveau Heights Elementary School more than four out of five utilized this arrangement. The range of PTA attendance is even greater: from 10% in Metropolis High School to 96% in Suburban Estates Elementary School. Scheduled Conferences, on the other hand, were attended by the vast majority of mothers in every elementary school which provided this arrangement.

Thus, in addition to the fact that certain arrangements are not universally available, even when these arrangements are provided they are not universally utilized. The wide range of utilization rates from one school to another merits further attention. For we are led to wonder under what conditions and in which school and community settings mothers tend to take extensive advantage of these school-structured arrangements. Are there patterns in the differential utilization of these observability arrangements?

Grouping the results of Table III.1 shows that in schools ranking high on the Observability Index, attendance at each school gathering is generally higher than in schools which rank low on the Observability Index.

TABLE III.2

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS UTILIZING EACH ARRANGEMENT WHEN AVAILABLE

Observability	Back-to School Night	Scheduled Conferences	PTA	Number of Mothers
High	76%	88%	70%	(511)
Low	46%	78	40	(796)
All Mothers	59%	83%	52%	(1307)

For example, in schools where there was a Back-to-School Night, 59% of the mothers reported that they attended this gathering. But in those schools where general observability was low, even though a Back-to-School Night was held, only 46% of the mothers reported attending, compared to 76% of the mothers in schools where overall observability was high. The percentages reporting attendance at Scheduled Conferences and PTA follow the same pattern.

It might have been assumed that when mothers are given a range of opportunities for visiting the school, they will be somewhat selective in choosing the channels they will utilize. On the other hand, when a PTA or a Back-to-School Night is the only formal arrangement for obtaining information, we might expect most mothers to take advantage of this arrangement. We find instead that the more opportunities the school provides, the more mothers take advantage of each opportunity.

Why should it be that more mothers attend the PTA in those settings where other opportunities are provided?[16] Perhaps in those schools which provide multiple opportunities for parents to obtain information, there is a climate of a prevailing Open Door Policy to which parents are responding. It is possible that in these schools, the normative climate generated by school personnel is one which encourages parents to utilize each opportunity to attend school functions. This, in turn, may lead to the establishment and strengthening of informal networks of mothers, which reinforces the tendency and ease of visiting the school. A further reinforcement process may occur in that coming to the school may generate greater knowledge and appreciation of the school's programs and goals, which in turn may generate increased impetus for further contact.[17]

In their study of two racially integrated and two segregated housing projects, Deutsch and Collins suggest that the normative climate generated by the management of the integrated projects may have helped facilitate contacts between Negro and white. Moreover, the shared problems and common experiences, and the inevitable informal contacts in the laundry room or play area provided a basis for friendship and paved the way for greater understanding between whites and Negroes.[18]

In the same way an unintended consequence of attendance at formal school meetings may be the formation of friendship groups based on recognition of mutual problems, resentments or satisfactions regarding the child's teacher, or the school's goals and practices. During the refreshment hour following the Back-to-School Night or PTA program, or during the period when parents are awaiting their Scheduled Conference, there is opportunity for mothers to meet one another informally and for social networks to develop.[19]

This then may partially account for the unexpected finding that in the Open Door schools (schools with high observability ratings) each arrangement is utilized more extensively than are these same arrangements in the low observability schools.

The Index of Formal School Contact

We have seen that there are great differences in the extent to which individual observability arrangements are utilized in different schools. Furthermore, we found that the existence of an Open Door Policy is associated with high utilization of each available channel for parental knowledge. We now turn to an analysis of the *number* of observability arrangements actually utilized by the mothers in the sample. For this purpose, the separate contacts of each mother were combined into an Index of *Formal* School Contact. Mothers may have utilized all three, two, only one, or none of the available channels provided by the school.

For purposes of further analysis, mothers with two or three contacts will be said to rank "high" and those with one or no contacts "low," on the Index of Formal School Contact. The distribution of the 1,307 mothers on the Index of Formal Contact is as follows:

3 Contacts	(248)	19%	52%	High
2 Contacts	(431)	33%		
1 Contact	(288)	22%	48%	Low
0 Contacts	(340)	26%		
All Mothers	(1307)[20]	100%		

We have already noted that under conditions of high observability, mothers utilize each available channel at a higher rate than under conditions of low observability. We now may ask: what effect does the degree of observability have on the number of contacts of each mother?

TABLE III.3

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WITH A GIVEN NUMBER OF CONTACTS BY OBSERVABILITY

Number of Contacts	Per cent ranking high or low on Index of Formal School Contact when observability is:			
	High		Low	
3	35%	75%	8%	38%
2	40		30	
1	13%	25%	30%	62%
0	12		32	
Number of Mothers	(511)		(796)	

As Table III.3 shows, overall contact (Index of Formal School Contact) is higher when observability is high than when it is low. Only 38% of the mothers in schools where opportunities are limited rank high on overall formal contact, compared to 75% in schools where an Open Door Policy exists. It is not surprising that overall utilization rates are higher in those schools which afford more opportunities for parental contact. What is unexpected, however, is that under conditions of high observability, these rates are twice as high as they are in low observability schools. Furthermore, it is significant that the percentage of mothers reporting no formal contact at all with the school is almost three times as great in the low as in the high observability schools. Apparently, when formal opportunities to visit the school are limited, parents tend to reject even the few opportunities which are available.

This appears to have implications for school policy. If schools are concerned with maintaining parental support, and if, as they have regularly asserted, such support is most forthcoming from an involved and informed parent body, the Open Door appears to be an important element of school policy. For when observability arrangements are generously provided by the schools, far more mothers turn out. When such arrangements are relatively limited, however, utilization rates drop sharply and fully three out of five mothers have little or no formal contact with the school.

Unfortunately, as some teachers have asserted, the parents who are reluctant to attend PTA meetings or teacher conferences are the very ones who are most critical of school policies. One teacher says:

> Why, oh why don't the parents who are bothered by some real or fancied slight to their children ever turn out for PTA meetings! Even when we get a good turnout, the parents who most need to be there aren't. They come to school afterward, questioning policies and practices that were thoroughly hashed out at the meeting. Other parents who stay away gossip and carp

> among themselves but won't come to school and tell their grievances to someone knowledgeable and in authority.[21]

If it is true that those parents who absent themselves from school gatherings are also the most critical of school policy,[22] schools may be performing a disservice to themselves, as well as to their clients, when they provide only limited opportunity for parental participation in school matters.

Utilization of school-structured arrangements for parental knowledge is substantially higher when such arrangements are generously provided than when they are relatively limited. What effect, however, do varying observability conditions have upon the utilization rates of mothers who are located in different school and community settings? When non-suburban mothers, for example, are provided with high observability, do they take advantage of these arrangements to the same extent as do suburban mothers? When working-class mothers are located in Open Door Schools do their participation rates approximate those of middle-class mothers? The rest of this chapter deals with these questions.

The Location of Utilizers and Non-Utilizers and School Level

In Chapter II we found that opportunities for mothers to visit the schools are more extensive for elementary than for high school mothers. Thus it is not surprising that utilization rates are higher for the former than for the latter (Table III.4). Even when Back-to-School Night and PTA are available to high school mothers, they do not attend as frequently as do elementary school mothers. At first our data seem to confirm the findings of previous studies, that elementary school mothers participate more in school affairs than do high school mothers,

TABLE III.4

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS UTILIZING EACH ARRANGEMENT AND PERCENTAGE RANKING HIGH ON THE INDEX OF FORMAL SCHOOL CONTACT BY SCHOOL LEVEL

School Type	Back-to-School Night	Scheduled Conferences	PTA	Index of Formal School Contact	Number of Mothers
Elementary	66%	83%	59%	59%	(962)
High School	44	*	36	34	(345)

*Not available for high school mothers.

until we control for observability.

The differences in utilization rates between high school and elementary school mothers are sharply reduced under conditions of high observability.

TABLE III.5

UTILIZATION RATES OF HIGH SCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL MOTHERS BY OBSERVABILITY

Channel	Observability High		Observability Low	
	Elementary School	High School	Elementary School	High School
Back-to-School Night	75%	77%	56%	32%
PTA	70	75	50	24
Index of Formal School Contact	76%	74%	46%	20%
Number of Mothers	(422)	(89)	(540)	(256)

As Table III.5 shows, when observability is high, high school mothers report as much attendence at Back-to-School Night and PTA as do elementary school mothers. Both groups have substantially less contact when observability is low than when it is high, but the reduction of opportunities has more impact on the utilization rates of high school than elementary school mothers. When extensive opportunities for mothers to participate in school affairs are provided, high school mothers take as much advantage of such opportunities as do elementary school mothers. When opportunities are limited, however, about half of the elementary school, but less than one-fourth of the high school mothers do so. That the elementary school serves the immediate neighborhood, while the high school draws its students from wider distances, may account for the fact that elementary school parents continue to utilize school-structured arrangements for observability in the low observability schools at a higher rate than do high school mothers.

Every study of parental contact with the school has found that high school parents attend school gatherings at a lower rate than elementary school parents.[23] None of these studies has controlled, however, for the number of opportunities available to high school as compared to elementary school parents. It is possible that low observability is characteristic of high schools in general, and that this may explain the relatively low attendance rates of high school parents found in previous studies.

Perhaps low utilization of school-provided opportunities for knowledge is not uniformly characteristic of high school parents.[24] Social class or community type difference, rather than school level may be more crucial in discriminating utilizers and non-utilizers. We proceed to examine differences in utilization rates by community type.

The Location of Utilizers and Non-Utilizers and Community Type

It has previously been seen (Table II.4) that suburban mothers are presented with more opportunities to visit the schools than are mothers in the city, small towns, or rural village. Correspondingly, we find that the overall contact of suburban mothers is higher than that of mothers in the other community types (Table III.6).

TABLE III.6

UTILIZATION RATES BY COMMUNITY TYPE

Community Type	Back-to-School Night	Scheduled Conferences	PTA	Per Cent Who Rank High on Index of Formal School Contact	Number of Mothers
City	35%	52%	38%	32%	(472)
Suburbs	74	75	73	75	(474)
Small Towns	64	88	42	50	(280)
Rural Village	*	92	37	41	(80)

*Not available in rural schools.

Next highest in overall contact are mothers in small towns, followed by mothers in the rural community, with city mothers ranking lowest. Our data are congruent with the opinion of Havighurst and Neugarten who state:

> Generally speaking, it is the school in a small town or small suburb where close school-family relationships are to be found. Here there is more immediate and local control by community members over school policy . . . and there is a greater amount

> of face-to-face acquaintanceship between teacher and parent. In the large city, where matters of school policy tend to be depersonalized and organized into 'the school system' and where school services are seen by the typical citizen as one of many specialized functions of the city government, relations between teacher and parent tend to become more remote.[25]

It will be noted that non-utilizers are concentrated in the two extreme community types -- the city and the rural area. While the statement of Havighurst and Neugarten may explain the low utilization rates in Metropolis, as compared to our suburban and small town schools, it does not explain why the rural mothers are relative non-utilizers of school-provided opportunities for knowledge. We would expect utilization rates of rural mothers to approximate those of the small town, rather than the large metropolis. Both rural schools, however, were rated low on the Observability Index. Table III.7 therefore compares utilization rates of mothers in the different community settings holding observability constant and a somewhat different picture emerges.

TABLE III.7

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON THE INDEX OF FORMAL SCHOOL CONTACT BY COMMUNITY TYPE AND OBSERVABILITY

Community Type	Observability		All Mothers
	High	Low	
Suburb	82% (335)	59% (138)	75% (473)
Small Town	70 (83)	43 (197)	50 (280)
Rural Village	* (0)	41 (80)	41 (80)
City	54 (92)	27 (376)	32 (468)
Per Cent Difference Between Suburbs and City	28%	22%	43%

The difference in utilization rates between small town and rural mothers disappears when observability is held constant (43% compared to 41%). More significantly, although the rank order remains the same, the gap between the suburban rates and those of the other community types is reduced under conditions of both high and low observability.

If we look at Table III.6 again, we see that there is a selective process with regard to the kinds of contacts utilized by mothers within each community type. Rural and small town mothers overwhelmingly utilize the scheduled conference as a channel for information regarding the school; in fact there is a progressive increase of attendance at scheduled conferences with decreasing community size.

On the other hand, PTA attendance is high only in the suburbs, with rates in the other three community types strikingly flat. Back-to-School Night is utilized almost as much by small town as by suburban mothers, and we suspect that had it been available in Green Hollow, mothers' rates of attendance at Back-to-School Night would have approximated those of suburban and small town mothers.

The substantially higher rate of PTA attendance among suburban mothers may reflect the general tendency of suburbanites to participate at a higher level than city or rural folk in all kinds of voluntary organizations.[26] Martin suggests that as a result of the daily commuting of males, women play an unusually important role in voluntary associations in the suburbs. Moreover, the fact that the commuters and their wives are also younger, wealthier, and better educated than non-commuters (all of which attributes have been found to be related to higher participation in voluntary associations) reinforces the likelihood that suburban mothers are more practiced in organizational participation, including the PTA.[27]

It may be then (as we noted in footnote 16 above) that the high attendance at PTA (and higher overall contact rates) of suburban mothers is partially an artifact of the higher socio-economic status of the suburban, compared to the non-suburban, population. Shortly, we will test this notion by analyzing the utilization rates of middle- and working-class mothers within suburban and non-suburban communities. Let us first see, however, if mothers' utilization of these school-provided arrangements is related to the socio-economic composition of the community.

Location of Utilizers and Non-Utilizers and Socio-Economic Level of the Community

Since school-structured opportunities for parental knowledge are relatively more numerous for mothers located in middle-class communities, it is not surprising to find (Table III.8) that utilization rates are higher in middle-class than in working-class attendance areas. Overall contact, as well as utilization of each arrangement offered by the schools, is higher for mothers in middle- than in working-class communities. The differences again are greatest for PTA attendance, and lowest for scheduled conferences. Table III.8 corroborates the findings of Sexton, Foskett, Herriott and St. John and others[28] that high socio-economic status and high parental participation in school events go hand in hand.

TABLE III.8

UTILIZATION RATES OF MOTHERS IN MIDDLE- AND WORKING CLASS ATTENDANCE AREAS

Socio-Economic Level	Back-to-School Night	Scheduled Conferences	PTA	Per Cent Who Rank High on Index of Formal School Contact	Number of Mothers
Middle-class	74%	88%	70%	68%	(505)
Working-class	55	78	49	51	(584)

*Mothers in the socio-economically heterogeneous rural community and city high school are excluded.

None of these studies, however, has taken into account that school-structured opportunities for contact may be more limited for the working-class parent. It is generally assumed that low participation rates among working-class parents are a function of lack of interest or time (since there are likely to be more working-mothers in this group).

TABLE III.9

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON THE INDEX OF FORMAL CONTACT BY SES OF ATTENDANCE AREA AND OBSERVABILITY

SES	Observability		All Mothers
	High	Low	
Middle-class	77% (350)	50% (154)	68% (504)
Working-class	72 (160)	43 (421)	51 (581)
Difference	+5%	+7%	+17%

Table III.9 shows that when observability is held constant, the differences in overall utilization rates between middle- and working-class mothers are greatly reduced: from a difference of 17% to differences of 5% and 7% under the differing socio-economic conditions. When opportunities for mothers to visit the school are relatively numerous, mothers in working-class communities take almost as much advantage of these opportunities as do mothers in middle-class areas. When opportunities are limited, the contacts of mothers in both middle- and working-class communities are reduced to almost the same level.

Thus it appears that a differentiator of utilization rates is the structural property of observability. For while the socio-economic level of the community makes a difference alone, when opportunity is equalized the general socio-economic level of the community has little impact on the utilization rates of mothers.

These findings raise more general questions about participation in voluntary associational activities and social class. They suggest that both social class and the opportunity structure must be considered, for given sufficient opportunity for participation, the traditionally apathetic working-class individual is almost as likely as his middle-class counterpart to take advantage of the opportunity.

Lipset, *et al.*[29] found that voting rates are highest among those occupational groups which are most affected by political decisions (e.g. government employees, wheat farmers, etc.). Certainly, school matters are more readily recognizable as of interest and as relevant to mothers, than are most political, economic, or cultural affairs; this may partially account for the elimination of the usual class differential when mothers' participation in school affairs was measured.[30]

Furthermore, Lipset, et al. report that "access to information about the relevance of government policies" through contact and communication is related to high turnout at the polls.

> In some European cities . . . the socialist labor movement has created a vast network of institutions for indoctrinating the workers from childhood on, men and women alike; all kinds of publications and cultural activities are operated by the socialist movement and flavor their output with political ideology. In these cities the usual class differential in voting turnout has been entirely eliminated or even reversed.[31]

Schools with high observability ratings permit the powerful combination of "access to information" and the recognition of "relevance." Together, these may help account for the elimination of the usual class differences in mothers' participation in school affairs in high observability settings.

The Location of Utilizers and Non-Utilizers and Educational Background

Thus far, we have used the characteristics of the community to define the characteristics of individuals, that is, instead of classifying mothers according to their own socio-economic position, we have classified them according to the socio-economic composition of their community. The analysis can be carried a step further by introducing the education of the individual mother. The relation between educational background and utilization rate will first be examined alone, and then within the various community and observability settings.

Parents were classified into two groups, one in which either husband or wife had attended college (at least for some time) and the other in which neither husband nor wife attended college. 501 mothers, or 37% of the sample, fell into the first category; 884, or 63% into the second.[32] We are using education, rather than income or some general measure of socio-economic status, since other studies have found that in attitudes regarding educational questions the former is a better differentiator of responses.[33]

Table III.10 shows that the education of parents makes a substantial difference in attendance at Back-to-School Night and PTA, but is only slightly related to utilization of the school-scheduled conference with the teacher. Ten per cent more college- than non-college mothers attended the scheduled conferences, while approximately 25% more took advantage of PTA and Back-to-School Night.

TABLE III.10

UTILIZATION RATES OF AVAILABLE ARRANGEMENTS
BY EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Educational Background	Back-to-School Night	Scheduled Conferences	PTA	Per Cent High on Index of Formal School Contact
College	74% (459)	89% (225)	69% (478)	67% (501)
Non-college	49 (711)	79 (378)	41 (768)	40 (884)

The large differences in Back-to-School Night and PTA attendance between college- and non-college mothers probably reflect the tendency for the less-educated, lower SES individual to be relatively inactive in voluntary associations.

> In general [says Sexton], lower-income adults tend to be non-joiners and non-participants . . . [they] rarely feel at ease in social groups.[34]

In the setting of the Back-to-School Night or PTA, the less educated mother may feel ineffective in her interaction with the well-dressed, well-educated middle-class mother. In the privacy afforded by the scheduled conference, however, she may feel less exposed and somewhat more in control of the situation.

The Scheduled Conference is thus a particularly effective arrangement for attracting the traditionally non-participating working-class parent to the school. This raises a more general question. Organizations which must articulate with a heterogeneous clientele, must obviously provide a variety of arrangements if they hope to reach all their constituents. Some of these arrangements will be effective in reaching one segment of the population, and some will be utilized by other segments. In this way the organization will be assured that it is reaching most of its clients. We might note that the Scheduled Conference for all parents is a relatively new arrangement which schools have provided. Formerly, the PTA was the major means of school-parent communication. That the PTA attracts the more educated, middle-class parent may partially account for social class differences in parental knowledge reported in previous studies.

We have already seen that mothers in suburban settings have higher utilization rates than do mothers in the other community types, and that mothers in middle-class areas take more advantage of school-provided opportunities for knowledge than do mothers in working-class areas. Does the educational background of the family affect the utilization rates of mothers in the different community settings? That is, are the differences in formal parental participation in school matters reduced, specified, or eliminated when educational background is introduced as a control?

TABLE III.11*

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON THE INDEX OF FORMAL CONTACT BY COMMUNITY TYPE AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Community Type	Educational Background		All Mothers
	College	Non-College	
Suburbs	86% (257)	64% (254)	75% (511)
Small Towns	63 (92)	45 (188)	50 (280)
Rural Community	61 (35)	31 (91)	41 (126)
City	41 (117)	23 (351)	32 (468)
Per Cent Difference Between City and Suburb	+45%	+41%	+43%

*Rather than burden the reader with a detailed table showing differences between college and non-college mothers in utilization of each type of contact, we only present differences in overall utilization rates, as indicated by the percentage ranking high on the Index of Formal Contact.

Table III.11 shows that the educational background of the mother does not account for the relationship between community type and utilization rates. While college mothers have higher participation rates than do non-college mothers within each community type, the rank ordering of the community types is unaffected and there is no reduction of the gap in utilization rates between suburban mothers and the others. In fact, the non-college mothers in the suburbs have at least as much contact as college mothers in any of the other community settings. Apparently, the "suburban way of life"[35] has involved even the less educated parent, who has traditionally been a non-joiner, in a network of school-home relationships to the extent that her overall contact with the school (64%) approximates the rate for all college mothers (67%).

The educational background of the mother is thus seen to have little effect on the relationship between community type and utilization of school-provided opportunity for parental knowledge. It does, however, have a conditional effect on the relation between the socio-economic level of the community and utilization rates. Earlier in this chapter we saw that utilization rates are higher in middle- than in working-class communities. Is this true when the educational background of the mother is held constant?

Table III.12 shows that the socio-economic level of the community still makes a difference in utilization for college mothers, but not at all for non-college mothers. While 80% of the college mothers rank high on the Index of Formal School Contact, if they live in predominantly middle-class areas, this is true of only 62% of the college mothers in working-class communities. The non-college mothers, on the other hand, have the same rate of utilization of school-provided opportunities for knowledge whether they live in middle- or in working-class areas (48%).

If we compare the utilization rates of college and non-college mothers within similar community settings, we find that, while in both middle- and working-class areas there are more high utilizers

TABLE III.12

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON THE INDEX OF FORMAL SCHOOL CONTACT BY SES OF ATTENDANCE AREA AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

SES	Educational Background		All Mothers
	College	Non-College	
Middle-class	80% (325)	48% (179)	68% (504)
Working-class	62 (95)	48 (524)	51 (619)
Difference	+18%	0	+17%

among the college than the non-college mothers, the difference between the two educational groups is much greater in middle-class than in the working-class settings (32% in the former, 14% in the latter).

Two questions are raised by the results shown in Table III.12. Why are the utilization rates of the better educated mothers somewhat depressed in working-class areas, and correspondingly, why are the rates of non-college mothers considerably depressed in middle-class areas? The numbers (in the parentheses) may provide an answer to both questions.

The college mother represents only 15% of the total (sample) population in working-class areas (95/619). She may be somewhat reluctant to attend gatherings at which the great majority of mothers are members of the working-class and differ from her in dress, values, and educational background. Correspondingly, the non-college mother in the middle-class setting may find it difficult to attend school gatherings at which the majority of mothers (65% or 325/504) are more educated, better dressed, and more skillful in the management of the required social skills. In working-class communities, the non-college mother may be more secure in a network of informal relations with her neighbors, and may feel more at ease in the social setting of the school where people like herself constitute a majority.

As Knupfer says:

> In part the lesser membership is, of course, caused by economic considerations -- the cost of membership and of going to meetings, and the many other incidental expenses. . . . In some cases there may be a reluctance to mix with persons of higher status. This would operate in the case of organizations which are predominantly middle class. The lower class mother may hesitate to go to Parent Teachers Association meetings, being unwilling to meet with women who have more money and education, because of her cheap clothes and her poor grammar.[36]

TABLE III.13

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON THE INDEX OF FORMAL SCHOOL CONTACT BY SOCIO-ECONOMIC LEVEL OF ATTENDANCE AGE, EDUCATION, AND OBSERVABILITY

SES	Observability High		Observability Low	
	College	Non-college	College	Non-college
Middle-class	84% (264)	55% (86)	62% (61)	42% (93)
Working-class	83 (30)	69 (130)	50 (54)	42 (367)
Difference	+1	-14%	+12%	0

While it appears that the utilization rates of non-college mothers are unaffected by whether they live in middle- or working-class communities, an interesting specification is seen when we introduce the structural property of observability as a control in Table III.13. We see that when observability is low, non-college mothers have a rate of 42% -- regardless of the socio-economic level of their community of residence. When observability is high, however, the non-college mother living in the working-class community actually has a 14% higher rate than her counterpart in the middle-class setting.

This surprising finding may confirm the "underdog" hypothesis. In the middle-class communities where high observability is provided, the better educated parent predominates at a ratio of more than three to one (264 to 86). This may inhibit the non-college mother from participating in school gatherings. In working-class communities, however, the non-college families outnumber their better educated counterparts by more than four to one. In this setting, when the school maintains an Open Door Policy, the non-college parent responds with a participation rate of 69% (higher than the rate of the college mother in low observability middle-class areas).

The relationship between observability and participation rates of both college and non-college mothers is particularly strong in the working-class areas. It is in these settings that the generous provision of formal channels for parental involvement appears to be most effective. The college mother's rate increases 33% (from 50% to 83%) and the non-college mother's, 27% (42% to 69%).

Schools have been accused of failing to communicate with parents located in the lower socio-economic areas. Our data suggest that when they do develop more extensive channels of communication in these areas, the response of parents is well worth the effort.

In Table III.12 we saw that college mothers living in middle-class areas had somewhat higher utilization rates than did college mothers residing in working-class communities. The introduction of observability, however (Table III.13), shows that when an Open Door

Policy prevails, the socio-economic level of the community makes no difference in the utilization rates of college mothers. Whether they live in middle- or working-class areas, when the school provides several observability arrangements, college mothers have the same high rates of attendance at school gatherings. This confirms the observations of sociologists that

> . . . the behavior or kinds of activity people engage in become a function to a considerable degree of the particular position or role occupied. . . . Social positions provide a set of behavior expectations for the individual and those he associates with. . . .[37]

Social participation in the form of attendance at school gatherings, which may be regarded as one element in role behavior, is a "way of life" for the better-educated parent. Not only do such matters as academic achievement, extra-curricular activities, and even school architecture impinge more directly on the value systems of the college-educated parent; not only do those in the upper socio-economic strata feel more at ease in talking about school affairs with those professionally engaged in education; in addition,

> the activities of the school are likely to be more functionally related to the everyday activities of those from the upper educational levels. The location of school buildings affects the real estate dealer, the athletic program affects the sporting goods dealer, the vocational training program affects the business employer, the health program may elicit the attention of the doctor.[38]

It is for these reasons that the better-educated parent, regardless of the predominant socio-economic character of her community of residence, will utilize observability arrangements which the schools provide.

The educational background of the mother thus specifies the relationship between community SES and utilization of school-provided opportunities for knowledge. One further question remains, namely, the effect that educational background of the mother, regardless of the socio-economic level of her community of residence, has on school contact within the two observability contexts. Both education and observability are highly related, as we have seen, to utilization rates. What are the joint effects, however, of education and observability on mothers' utilization of each type of school-provided opportunity, as well as on overall contact with the school?

Looking first at the separate items in Table III.14, we see that whether observability is high or low, college mothers take advantage of each available opportunity more than non-college mothers. Again it is in attendance at PTA meetings that the difference between the more and less educated mothers is most pronounced. Still, for each item (with the exception of attendance at Scheduled Conferences) the non-college mother in high observability contexts has a higher utilization rate than does the college mother in low observability contexts.

TABLE III.14

UTILIZATION RATES BY EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND AND OBSERVABILITY

Type of Contact	Observability High		Observability Low	
	College	Non-college	College	Non-college
Back-to-School Night	82%	66%	59%	42%
Scheduled Conferences	91	84	85	77
PTA	81	54	50	37
Per Cent High on Index of Formal Contact	84%	63%	44%	32%
Number of Mothers	(294)	(216)	(189)	(602)

When the joint effect of education and observability on mothers' overall contacts is examined, it appears that the reduction of observability affects the overall utilization rate of college mothers somewhat more than that of non-college mothers. The percentage of college mothers ranking high on the Index of Formal School Contact drops from 84% to 44% as we move from high to low observability; the drop is slightly less for the non-college mother, from 63% to 32%. More significant, however, is the fact that the overall utilization rate for non-college mothers under conditions of high observability is substantially higher than the rate for college mothers under conditions of low observability.

Thus when the school provides extensive opportunity for parents to obtain knowledge about school matters, both college and non-college mothers, but especially the former, utilize these opportunities at a high rate. When these opportunities are relatively limited, however, the college mothers sharply reduce their rate of formal contact, narrowing the gap between themselves and their non-college counterparts. Why, under conditions of low observability, does the better educated mother curtail her rate of formal contact with the school?

Most college mothers (63%) are located in communities in which the schools maintain an Open Door Policy, that is, where multiple arrangements for parental observability exist. In those schools, however, where such arrangements are limited, the better educated mother may turn to alternative channels in order to obtain information about school matters. These alternative sources of information, such as the principal, other school personnel, teacher friends, or school board members may not be as readily available to the working-class parent, who therefore must rely for her knowledge on the formal arrangements which the school may provide.[39]

Summary

Previous studies have found that elementary school, suburban, and middle-class or better educated parents have more contact with the schools than do high school, non-suburban, and working-class parents. Our data corroborate these findings. Further analysis has revealed, however, that while school level or community setting may differentiate utilizers and non-utilizers of school-structured opportunities for parental knowledge, the structural property of observability is a factor which must be taken into account in any analysis of parental contact with the schools. Furthermore, while individual educational background is related to the extent of parental participation in school affairs, as other studies have shown, this relationship is reduced or modified within different community settings and under different conditions of observability.

The finding that the structural property of observability has the effect of reducing the powerful relationship between educational background and school contact, has implications extending beyond the problem of school-home relationships. It suggests that certain structural factors may be operating to reduce differences in behavior which have commonly been attributed to educational or general socio-economic characteristics of respondents.

We know that voting turnout, participation in voluntary associations, knowledge of political matters are generally higher for the more educated members of the society. This has usually been attributed to apathy, lack of interest, lack of social skills, or poor socialization commonly associated with membership in the lower socio-economic groups. It is possible, however, that while these factors undoubtedly affect knowledge and participation rates, we may have ignored the crucial variable of organizationally-structured opportunity. It may be that certain organizational arrangements, designed to provide greater ease of communication and access to information, may be effective in increasing the participation of the traditional non-participants in formal organizational activity.

CHAPTER III

FOOTNOTES

[1] T. Morris, op. cit., p. 140.

[2] R. A. Cloward and J. A. Jones, "Social Class: Educational Attitudes and Participation," Education in Depressed Areas, ed. A. H. Passow (New York: Teachers College Press, 1963), p. 208.

[3] Sexton, op. cit., p. 107.

[4] Ibid., p. 228.

[5] R. E. Herriott and N. H. St. John, Social Class and the Urbam School (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1966), p. 41.

[6] Cloward and Jones, op. cit., p. 213.

[7] J. M. Foskett, "New Facts About Lay Participation," The Nation's Schools, LIV (August, 1954) and "Who Discusses School Affairs?" School Executive, XIV (February, 1955).

[8] R. F. Carter, Voters and Their Schools (Stanford, California: Stanford University, 1960).

[9] Litwak and Meyer, op. cit.

[10] Sexton, op. cit., pp. 166, 228.

[11] H. Grobman, "Attitudes of Parents Toward School Programs," Clearing House (October, 1958), p. 69.

[12] R. C. Martin, Government and the Suburban School (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1962), pp. 16-17.

[13] B. Fine, "Educational Problems in the Suburbs," The Suburban Community, ed. W. Dobriner (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1958), p. 319.

[14] While 40% of the mothers report attending two or more PTA meetings during the school year, it was decided to differentiate the 48% who had attended no PTA meeting from the 52% who had attended at least one such meeting.

[15] Scheduled conferences were held in New Home Elementary School only for parents of children in Grades 1-4. 74% of First Grade mothers attended these conferences.

[16] The obvious explanation is a socio-economic one. Observability arrangements are more prevalent in suburbs and middle-class areas, where participation rates would normally be expected to be high. Later we shall test this explanation, however, and find that it only partially accounts for the finding that the more opportunities the school provides the more mothers take advantage of each opportunity.

[17] In later chapters we will assess the joint effects of observability and contact on parental satisfaction with the school and knowledge about it.

[18] M. Deutsch and M. E. Collins, "Interracial Housing," American Social Patterns, ed. W. Petersen (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc.), pp. 7-63.

[19] We have no direct indicators of the extent to which informal networks of parents are formed as a consequence of parental attendance at school gatherings. In chapter VI we will present data, however, showing that such attendance is accompanied by a higher frequency of discussion of school matters with other parents, and a higher rate of "neighboring."

[20] The 85 mothers in Green Hollow and New Home High Schools are excluded from this analysis since in the former a PTA, and in the latter a Back-to-School Night, were the only observability arrangements available to parents. Mothers in these schools could at most have had only one type of formal contact with the school. In these two schools, only 28% of the mothers have utilized the one channel available to them; 72% have had no formal contact at all with the school.

[21] Morris, op. cit., p. 141.

[22] In Chapter IX we shall analyze the relationship between parental involvement in the schools and support of their financial programs. We shall show that the school attracts critical and non-critical parents to its gatherings in about the same proportions.

[23] See footnotes 10 and 11 above.

[24] The results of Table III.4 may be somewhat misleading since the only two high schools ranking high in observability are located in wealthy suburban communities. As none of the high schools in working-class areas rank high on the Index of Observability, it cannot be

determined whether the high contacts of mothers in Suburban Estates and Nouveau Heights are the result of the extensive opportunities offered them by their schools, or of their high socio-economic status. An indication that it may be the former, however, is provided when we see that of the 25 working-class mothers in these two communities, that is mothers with only a high school education, 16 rank on the Index of Formal School Contact.

[25] R. J. Havighurst and B. L. Neugarten, Society and Education (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1962), p. 122.

[26] S. Greer, "The Social Structure and Political Process of Suburbia," American Sociological Review, XXV (August, 1960), pp. 514-526.

[27] W. T. Martin, "The Structuring of Social Relationships Engendered by Suburban Residence," American Sociological Review, XXI (August, 1956), pp. 446-453.

[28] See footnotes 3 - 9 above.

[29] S. M. Lipset et al., "The Psychology of Voting: An Analysis of Political Behavior," Handbook of Social Psychology, ed. G. Lindzey (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1954), Vol. II, pp. 1124-1174.

[30] There is little difference in the reported interest in school matters between mothers in middle-class and working-class areas. 77% of the former and 71% of the latter report that they are "very interested" in school affairs.

[31] Lipset et al., op. cit., p. 1131.

[32] In the balance of this dissertation we will refer to these two groups as "college" and "non-college" mothers respectively. The distinction between those with "some college" and those with "no college" was adopted after preliminary analysis had indicated that it was a crucial differentiator of mothers' responses to a number of questions.

[33] D. Wilder, "Social Factors in the Awareness Perception and Evaluation of the Teaching of Reading," Bureau of Applied Social Research, 1965 (mimeographed); also J. M. Foskett, "Who Discusses School Affairs?" pp. 79-81; D. M. Black, "Public Attitudes Toward Education," Journal of Experimental Education, XXIX (September, 1960), pp. 23-26.

[34] Sexton, op. cit., p. 108.

[35] S. Fava, "Suburbanism As a Way of Life," American Sociological Review, XXI (February, 1956), pp. 34-38.

[36] G. Knupfer, "Portrait of the Underdog," Class, Status and Power: A Reader in Social Stratification, ed. R. Bendix and S. Lipset (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1953), pp. 255-63.

[37] J. M. Foskett, "New Facts About Lay Participation," p. 66.

[38] J. M. Foskett, "Who Discusses School Affairs?" p. 81. It may be too that for college mothers, attendance at school gatherings serves to reinforce social networks which extend beyond the setting of the school. Invitations to cocktail parties, informal gatherings, dinners, etc. may constitute rewards which are by-products of contacts made at the school.

[39] In Chapter VII we will present evidence that college mothers utilize alternative sources of knowledge more than do non-college mothers, especially when the school has only limited formal arrangements for parental observability.

CHAPTER IV

THE DISTRIBUTION OF PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE[1] ABOUT THE SCHOOL

We have seen that the structural property of observability must be taken into account in an analysis of potential contact with the school. When observability, or the extent to which the school provides formal arrangements for increasing communication between school and home, is introduced as a control, the usual differences in participation rates between elementary and high school mothers, between suburban and non-suburban mothers, and between mothers in middle- and working-class communities are either reduced or eliminated. The rates of formal school contacts of all mothers, regardless of school level, community type, or individual or community socio-economic level are high when observability is high and are sharply reduced when school-structured opportunities for parental knowledge are limited.

Our ultimate concern, however, is with the extent to which the arrangements which schools may provide in order to make themselves more visible to parents are in fact related to parental knowledge about the school. As Merton has suggested, after identifying the "structural arrangements and group processes which provide for [observability]," the sociologist needs "to establish whether these structural arrangements provide for greater knowledge."[2] Thus Merton raises the question of the conditions under which observability leads or does not lead to actual knowledge. To deal with this relationship empirically is one of the explicit objectives of this study, just as it was implicit in Blau's analysis of the latent functions and dysfunctions attendant upon the introduction of statistical records in an unemployment agency.[3] This monitoring arrangement enabled supervisors to obtain ready information regarding the performance of employees.

On the basis of admittedly scanty evidence from small group research on perception, Hopkins suggested a series of propositions linking observability with other structural properties of groups such as rank, centrality, influence, and conformity.[4] Thus he suggested that for any member of a small group, the greater his centrality (frequency of interaction) relative to other members, the greater his observability, or for any member of a small group, the higher his rank, the greater his observability.[5]

Although Hopkins' discussion focusses upon rank, centrality and observability of group members within small, informal groups, several of his propositions may prove useful in our analysis of observability provided by an organization for its clients. Hopkins defined observability as Merton did, nevertheless he stated that for methodological reasons he was operationalizing observability as ". . . a member's actual knowledge of group norms" rather than attempting "to assess his structurally given opportunity to know them."[6] Thus, while Hopkins' contribution was valuable in emphasizing the analytical distinction between opportunity for knowledge and actual knowledge, he left untouched the problem area raised in Merton's discussion of observability, namely that of the empirical relation between structural arrangements for knowledge and actual knowledge.

Our data provide an opportunity to test this relationship. Chapter II, it will be remembered, identified several school-structured arrangements that are designed to promote parental knowledge about the school. The twenty elementary and high schools in the sample were ranked either high or low on an index of observability, according to the extent to which these arrangements were provided. This chapter and the following one examine the extent to which parental knowledge regarding selected items of information about the school is greater in the high-observability schools than in the low-observability ones. This chapter lays the groundwork for such analysis by examining the extent of knowledge regarding selected items of information about the school among the mothers in the sample, and the differential distribution of such knowledge among mothers located in various school and community settings.

Few clues to the extent and correlates of parental knowledge about the school are provided by previous research. Although there are abundant data regarding parental satisfaction with their local schools and attitudes toward them, little research has investigated the extent of parental knowledge regarding school matters.

In Voters and Their Schools,[7] Carter concluded that voters (in school bond elections) know very little about school practices. His measure of such "knowledge," however, is of dubious validity since it is based solely on the percentage of "don't know" responses to a series of items regarding what the tasks of the schools should be. For example, voters were rated as knowledgeable when they ventured an opinion regarding such statements as "pupils should study home economics," or "pupils should learn loyalty to the United States of America and the American way of life," or "schools should offer a good recreational program."[8] There was no evidence as to whether respondents correctly perceived the schools as performing these tasks. As Glock et al. note:

> Some people are ready to express an opinion on the basis of relatively little or no knowledge while others will not do so until they have given careful thought and consideration to the facts.[9]

Carter found "knowledge" to be directly related to participation in school matters, and both of these to be higher for parents of schoolchildren than for other adults, for younger than older women, for the better-educated adults than for the less well-educated ones. (Participation in school matters was gauged by such indicators as frequency of visiting the schools or attending school gatherings, of talking with teachers or school officials, of thinking about school matters, of talking with neighbors about school problems, or of criticizing the schools to someone. Such "participation" in school events may have reduced the tendency to answer "don't know," without indicating the actual knowledge or information of respondents regarding the performance of the school.

In a report on parental knowledge about schools by Hines and Grobman, the authors state that

> . . . most of what parents and the community know about local education has to do with either athletics or band. But the really basic questions concerning education of the youth, the matters dealing with the fundamentals of the school system, generally remain relatively obscure.[10]

They present no data, however, to support this conclusion.

Litwak and Meyer, in their analysis of mechanisms linking home and school and the relationship of such mechanisms to children's reading scores, include a chapter on parental knowledge about school matters.[11] The supposed indicators of "knowledge," however, can more accurately be categorized as "opinion." Parents, for example, were asked how many years of schooling were required for various occupations such as bus driver, shoe clerk, or doctor. No questions were asked which might reflect a parent's accuracy of perception of selected school goals, practices, or personnel.

Previous studies thus provide few leads to the extent of parental knowledge about schools. Some expectations, however, regarding differences in the distribution of parental knowledge are suggested by the general findings of public opinion research.

Studies of the public's knowledge of political issues or current affairs have shown such knowledge to be higher for the more educated segment of the population, for the more interested members of the public, and for those to whom the particular piece of information is relevant. This leads us to expect that knowledge of school matters will be greater for the more educated and more interested mothers, as well as for those with comparative high educational aspirations for their children (this last being taken as an indicator of the relevance of school matters).

It has also been found that knowledge of public affairs is greater among those who serve as informal opinion leaders on such matters in a community.[12] On this basis we tentatively assume that mothers who state that others frequently ask their opinion about school matters will be particularly informed regarding them.

In this way public opinion research provides leads to the correlates of parental knowledge about school matters. Still, it is apparent that knowledge of foreign affairs or domestic politics and knowledge of school matters are quite different. Most research in the field of public opinion attests the widespread lack of information of the public concerning political or economic matters. We are concerned here, however, not with knowledge of general educational issues but with specific information about the neighborhood school which the child attends. While attendance at school gatherings, a college education, interest in school matters or high educational aspirations for children may be associated with relatively high levels of parental knowledge, the absence of these factors may not be paralleled by an absence of school-related information. After all, every mother has had some formal schooling herself, and so is not a total stranger to schools and what goes on there. Parents would find it difficult to escape having some information about the school in a society where schools are not only ubiquitous but often become sources of community controversy and public discussion. We expect therefore that the general level of school-specific information will be relatively high as compared with knowledge of public affairs or even of general educational issues. Let us then examine the general distribution of knowledge about selected items of information about their children's schools within our sample of mothers.

Indicators of Knowledge

The indicators of mothers' knowledge of the school fall into two general categories: items pertaining to school personnel, and items pertaining to school practices. The first category includes such matters as knowledge of the teacher's or principal's name, or whether the school has a psychologist, nurse, librarian, or other designated personnel. The second category consists of such items as whether the school gives IQ tests or achievement tests, whether it teaches the New Math, employs TV in the classroom, or utilizes other designated school practices.

The responses to the separate items (Table IV.1) suggest that mothers know more about school personnel than about school practices. While more than three out of four mothers know the teacher's or principal's name and almost all are acquainted with the fact that the school has a nurse on the premises, two of every three mothers responded that they do not know whether skipping or "social promotion"[13] are practiced, or whether programmed learning is part of the school's curriculum. Only slightly more than half of the mothers know that IQ and achievement tests are regularly administered or that TV is sometimes used in the classroom.

The outstanding exception to mothers' general ignorance of school practices is the New Math, which three-quarters of the respondents correctly stated is being taught in the system. Of all the school practices about which mothers were questioned, this is the one which is most widely visible to parents. Perhaps this is because most of the schools had only recently instituted the New Math as part of

TABLE IV.1

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO KNOW ABOUT SELECTED SCHOOL PERSONNEL AND SCHOOL PRACTICES

Know principal's name	81%
Know teacher's name[14]	76%
Know whether school has:	
Nurse	97%
Music teacher	85%
Gym teacher or coach	82%
Librarian	66%
Assistant principal	62%
Psychologist	47%
Know whether school system:	
Teaches New Math*	72%
Teaches foreign language in elementary school	64%
Uses TV in the classroom	57%
Gives IQ tests*	56%
Gives achievement tests*	56%
Groups slow learners	50%
Groups fast learners	49%
Uses teaching machines	37%
Practices social promotion	36%
Practices skipping	35%
Number of mothers	(1392)

*These were universally employed among the schools in the sample.

their curriculum and principals reported that they had made special efforts to explain the reasons for its introduction to parents through bulletins, PTA meetings, or the Back-to-School Night. Even without such meetings or bulletins, however, the parent who sits down to help the child with his arithmetic homework can hardly be unaware of the fact that the New Math is being taught.[15]

The rather limited extent of knowledge about other school practices, especially skipping and social promotion, may be a direct effect of attempts of school personnel to insulate these practices from parental observability. Even during my interviews with the principals of each school, it was often difficult to learn whether certain practices were actually employed in the school. Principals were frequently reluctant to state in so many words that a practice such as skipping or social promotion was regularly employed. This reluctance may stem from the recognition that there is dissensus among parents about the desirability of these practices.[16]

If principals were hesitant to inform the interviewer whether these educational practices were being utilized in the school system, they may also be reluctant to make this known to parents. This is reminiscent of the practice of many political leaders in election campaigns who

> . . . may avoid discussing an issue which they assume to be prominent but which they also assume to be a weak point in their political position. The Democratic candidates' avoidance of the corruption issue in 1952 is a case in point.[17]

This tendency seems to exist in various kinds of social systems. Merton notes that a certain amount of ignorance, or insulation from observability may be functional for a system. He says:

> . . . if the facts of all role-behavior and all attitudes were freely available to anyone, social structures could not operate. . . . 'Privacy' is not merely a personal predilection; it is an important functional requirement for the effective operation of social structure.[18]

Similarly, in his paper, "The Role of the Category of Ignorance in Sociological Theory," Schneider suggests that ignorance may be functional for a system when knowledge regarding certain actions or attitudes would be painful or distasteful to the observer, but would have no positive consequences.[19]

Another factor contributing to the higher proportion of mothers knowing about school personnel than school practices may be that personnel are people and people are generally more visible than ideas, issues, or practices. Public opinion studies have found that the public is more likely to recognize the names of people who have appeared in the newspaper, or of political candidates, than to be aware of current issues or have an opinion regarding them.[20]

Unless they impinge on the everyday, personal lives of individuals, issues are not as likely as are people to be accurately identified. Erskine's data show that in 1950 only 27% of a national cross-section of Americans were familiar with the issue of Farm Price Supports, whereas understandably 43% of the farming population had heard of the issue. Similarly, "right-to-work" laws were familiar to only 66% of the general population as compared with 82% of "union families."[21]

It may be that the recent emphasis on mathematics and science, as well as the fact that the child usually has daily homework assignments in math, has made this subject more relevant to parents and so one they are likely to know about.

The Indices of Knowledge: Personnel and Practices

Since school personnel and school practices appear to be two different subjects of parental knowledge, it was decided to keep them separate for purposes of analysis. Accordingly two indices of parental knowledge were constructed: an index of knowledge of school personnel and an index of knowledge of school practices.[22]

The indices were formed as follows:

Index of Personnel

1) Know teacher's name
2) Know principal's name
3) No "don't know" responses regarding other school personnel[23]

Index of Practices

1) Know about IQ tests
2) Know about achievement tests
3) Know about New Math
4) 0 - 1 "don't know" responses regarding other school practices[24]

Mothers knowing both the name of the teacher and the principal and with no "don't know" responses to the questions regarding other school personnel, were classified as ranking "high" on the Index of Personnel; the others ranked "low" on this Index. As can be seen in Table IV.2, slightly over 1/3 of the mothers rank high on the Index of Personnel, with the rest ranking low.

TABLE IV.2

NUMBER OF ITEMS IN INDICES OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES CORRECTLY PERCEIVED BY MOTHERS

Index of Personnel			Index of Practices		
Know all 3	34%	High 34%	Know all 4	19%	High 47%
			Know 3	28%	
Know 2	40%	Low 67%	Know 2	26%	Low 52%
Know 1	19%		Know 1	17%	
Know 0	8%		Know 0	9%	
Number of mothers	(1392)		Number of mothers	(1392)	

Mothers were ranked high on the Index of Practices if they correctly answered the three questions regarding IQ tests, achievement tests, and the New Math, or answered two of these three questions and had only one or no "don't know" responses regarding the other school practices. Almost half of them ranked high on the Index of Practices and half, low.

The Index of Personnel could have been divided into three segments, resulting in the following distribution:

High: 34% (know all 3)
Medium: 40% (know 2)
Low: 27% (know 1 or 0)

It is more convenient, however, to dichotomize both indices, since we shall be comparing the mothers' scores on the two indices, and shall construct an Index of Total Knowledge by distinguishing those who rank high from those ranking low on both indices.

Table IV.2 shows that the percentage of mothers unable to answer any questions at all regarding school personnel is about the same as that for school practices (8% and 9% respectively). Only 19%, however, were able to answer all four questions about practices, while almost twice that number (34%) correctly responded to the three personnel items.

The next section examines the correlations of the scores of mothers on the two indices.

Chronic Know-Nothings

Investigators of the public's knowledge of domestic or foreign affairs have found that lack of information regarding the one is highly correlated with lack of information about the other. Hyman and Sheatsley, for example, found that people who were uninformed regarding the Palestine report[25] were also ignorant of other items in the news at that time.[26] They conclude that,

> there is something about the uninformed which makes them harder to reach, no matter what the level or nature of the information.[27]

and that a considerable proportion of the population constitutes "a hard core of 'chronic know-nothings'."[28]

We assumed that the proportion of chronic know-nothings about school matters would be small compared to that found in studies of public opinion, since school matters are presumably of greater interest and relevance to mothers than are public affairs to the general population. It turns out that 42% of the mothers in the sample rank low on both indices of knowledge (Table IV.3), while only 22% rank high on both indices.[29]

TABLE IV.3

MOTHERS' RANKINGS ON INDICES OF KNOWLEDGE OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES

Ranking		Per Cent
High on both		22%
High on one		36%
Personnel only	11%	
Practices only	25%	
Low on both (chronic know-nothings)		42%
Number of mothers		(1392)

Hyman and Sheatsley suggest that chronic know-nothingism results from apathy and lack of interest.[30] Apparently this is not true for mothers' knowledge of school matters. Table IV.4 shows that the proportion of chronic know-nothings is only slightly less among those mothers reporting that they are "very interested" in school affairs; 38% of these mothers still rank low on both indices of knowledge.

Why should reported interest and knowledge be almost unrelated when it is a question of mothers' knowledge of school matters, but highly related when it is a question of the public's knowledge regarding current issues? It may be that norms do not require people to express interest in public affairs but that they do require that parents be interested in matters having to do with their child's education. This may explain why over 70% of the mothers in our sample report high interest in school matters, and why neither the socio-economic position of individuals, the socio-economic composition of their communities nor the grade level of their children discriminate the more from the less interested mothers. A mother's professed interest in school matters may therefore be only a crude indicator of her real interest (evidenced more, as Chapter VI shows, by her rate of participation in school affairs) and thus may bear little relation to her knowledge of school matters.

Hyman and Sheatsley assume that the opportunity for knowledge of public affairs is more or less equal for all segments of the population. Information campaigns fail, they say, not because of "external factors of accessibility to information media" but because of psychological factors which prevent the chronic know-nothings from exposing themselves to the mass media. Still they present data indicating that the level of knowledge among small-town residents is somewhat lower

TABLE IV.4

MOTHERS' RANKINGS ON COMBINED INDICES OF KNOWLEDGE BY EXPRESSED INTEREST IN SCHOOL MATTERS

Ranking on indices of knowledge	Interest in school matters	
	Very interested	Not very interested
High on both	26%	13%
High on one	36%	37%
Low on both (chronic know-nothings)	38%	50%
Number of mothers	(1002)	(375)

than that among city dwellers and acknowledge that this may be because information is less readily available to the former. They then proceed to show, however, that such variations are relatively small in comparison with psychological differences.[31]

We assume here that when it is a question of mothers' information regarding school matters, apathy or lack of interest will be less crucial than certain social-structural barriers in producing a core of chronic know-nothings. We already know (see Chapter II) that school-structured opportunities for knowledge about the school are not equally available to the mothers in our sample. Let us than examine the extent to which the provision by schools of arrangements for parental observability is related to the level of actual parental knowledge about school personnel and praqtices.

Observability and Parental Knowledge

It would seem hackneyed to show that when schools provide relatively greater opportunities for parents to obtain information, such information is greater. Although this is the case, as Tables IV.5(A) and IV.5(B) indicate, there are several questions which must be answered before we conclude that the provision of these arrangements by schools is associated with a high enough level of parental knowledge to warrant their existence.

TABLE IV.5(A)

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON THE INDICES OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES BY OBSERVABILITY

Observability	Index of Personnel	Index of Practices	Number of mothers
High	46%	59%	(511)
Low	26	40	(881)

TABLE IV.5(B)

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON BOTH, ONE, OR NEITHER INDEX OF KNOWLEDGE BY OBSERVABILITY

Observability	High on both	High on one	Low on both	Number of mothers
High	34%	36%	29%	(511)
Low	15	36	49	(881)

Table IV.5(A) shows that about 20% more mothers rank high on either of the two indices of knowledge when observability is high than when it is low. Observability alone does not appear to make more of a difference for one of the dimensions of knowledge than for the other.

Similarly, in Table IV.5(B), we see that the percentage of chronic know-nothings (that is, those who rank low on both indices) is 20% higher in those schools which provide only limited observability. Fully half of the mothers in these schools are classified as relatively ignorant regarding both personnel and practices. It appears too, that the structural property of observability is somewhat more related to the rate of chronic know-nothingism than is the psychological factor of parental interest. A glance back at Table IV.4 reminds us that 38% of the mothers reporting deep interest in school matters nevertheless rank low on both indices of knowledge, while Table IV.5(B) shows that 29% of the mothers in high-observability schools rank low on both indices.

The question arises, then, are extensive arrangements by the school for observability an effective means of increasing the level of parental knowledge? Are the hopes which educators have voiced of reducing the large core of poorly informed and potentially dissatisfied parent-clients fulfilled by their maintenance of an Open Door Policy. The question cannot be answered with precision, but our data provide indications.

Almost halving the rate of chronic know-nothingism (from 49% to 29%) would seem a substantial return for school personnel, possibly justifying the effort involved in establishing and maintaining open communication channels between school and parents. From the standpoint of school administrators, there is the further question: are more knowledgeable parents apt to become supporters of school programs and policies? Chapters VIII and IX examine the relationship between parental knowledge about the school and support of its programs.

Before proceeding to the question of observability as a means of ensuring a high level of parental knowledge about the schools we first examine the possibility that the relationships uncovered in Tables IV.5(A) and IV.5(B) may be spurious. In Chapters II and III we found that college-educated families tend to be located in high observability settings. The higher rate of knowledge associated with high observability may be a reflection of the large college population in these settings.

Not surprisingly, public opinion studies find that knowledge of current issues and political affairs is concentrated in the better educated segment of the population. Again, as one would suppose and as Katz and Lazarsfeld summarize the results of cumulative research:

> . . . the better educated people are the ones who read more books and magazines and listen more frequently to radio programs and forums which deal with the world of current affairs.[32]

From this we might also expect that mothers with college backgrounds know more about the schools than their counterparts without a college education. Table IV.6 shows that more college mothers rank high on both indices of knowledge than do non-college mothers. As matter of fact, a comparison of Tables IV.5(A) and IV.6 shows a striking similarity between the relationship of observability and that of education to mothers' knowledge of school personnel and school practices. It may be then that it is not the opportunity structure provided by schools, but rather the individual attribute of education,

TABLE IV.6

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON INDICES OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES BY EDUCATION

Education	Personnel	Practices	Number of mothers
College mothers	47%	62%	(500)
Non-college mothers	26	39	(871)

TABLE IV.7

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON INDICES OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES BY OBSERVABILITY AND EDUCATION

Observability	Knowledge of Personnel		Knowledge of Practices		Number of Mothers	
	College	Non College	College	Non-College	College	Non-College
High	51%	39%	66%	50%	(294)	(216)
Low	42	22	57	36	(207)	(668)
Per Cent Difference	+9	+17	+9	+14		

which differentiates the more from the less knowledgeable mothers. Whether this is so can be seen in Table IV.7 which examines the joint effects of observability and education on mothers' knowledge of personnel and practices.

Table IV.7 shows first that observability and education together have a substantial effect on mothers' knowledge of both school personnel and practices. While 51% of the college mothers in high observability contexts rank high on knowledge of personnel, and

66% on knowledge of practices, the corresponding figures for non-college mothers in low observability settings are 22% and 36%. Thus observability and education jointly produce a difference of about 30% in the proportion of knowledgeable mothers.

Secondly, we see that education does not completely account for the relationship between observability and knowledge which was indicated in Table IV.5(A). For given equal education, observability still makes a substantial difference in knowledge, especially for the knowledge of the non-college mother. The college mother's knowledge about school personnel is 9% higher, but the non-college mother's is 17% higher in high observability settings than in low ones. The difference is not substantial, but it suggests that the traditionally less knowledgeable mother can be reached by the observability arrangements which schools may provide. In fact, we find that under conditions of high observability, the differences in knowledge between college and non-college mothers are somewhat reduced, while they remain constant in low observability settings. When the school provides more opportunities for mothers to obtain information regarding school matters, non-college mothers are closer to college mothers in the extent of their knowledge than when such opportunities are limited. This is especially true for knowledge of personnel, where non-college mothers in high observability settings are about as informed as are college mothers in low observability schools (39% compared to 42%).

Thus education makes a difference in mothers' knowledge when the school does not intervene to provide sufficient opportunities for parents to obtain information; but when such opportunities are offered, the gap in knowledge between college and non-college mothers is reduced.

Apparently, the familiar class differences in knowledge found in other studies of parental information about the schools as well as in most public opinion studies can be partly explained by the fact that the more educated segment of the population is provided with greater opportunity for access to sources of knowledge. As Converse remarks:

> Any theory of mass voting behavior must come to grips at the outset . . . with the fact that information about politics is as inequitably distributed as wealth in the mass public.[33]

Our findings suggest, that if it were in some measure possible to reduce the opportunity gap (as is being done to some extent in the current Head Start Program), there might be an accompanying reduction in the usual class differences in actual knowledge.

We may ask, however, whether school-structured arrangements to increase parental knowledge operate in the same manner for parents who are located in different school and community settings. Are such arrangements required for knowledge in small towns or rural areas where information about schools may be obtained through more informal channels? Are they associated with an increase in the level of knowledge of the traditionally non-participating mother of the high school child? Are they necessary for mothers who are located in middle-class areas where the reservoir of knowledge is presumably higher? This chapter goes on to examine the level of knowledge of mothers who are located in different school and community settings, in order to determine the relationship of such location to parental knowledge.

Knowledge by School Level

We already know that elementary school mothers are provided with more opportunities to obtain information about the school than are high school mothers (see Chapter II). We expect, therefore, that the former will have higher levels of knowledge than the latter. Table IV.8 shows that this is true for knowledge of school personnel, but not of school practices.

TABLE IV.8

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON INDICES OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES BY SCHOOL LEVEL

School Level	Personnel	Practices	Number of mothers
Elementary School	40%	45%	(962)
High School	18	52	(430)

Apparently, by the time a child reaches the high school level, even though mothers may have little contact with the school they are aware that certain school practices exist in the system. Personnel, however, are in the particular school, rather than system-wide, and the mother of the 10th grade student (whose child may have been in the high school only one year) may have had little opportunity to learn that, say a psychologist or a librarian are in the school.

When observability is introduced as a control, we find that location in a high observability setting is related to an increase in the level of parental knowledge for both elementary and high school mothers. Elementary school mothers still know considerably more about school personnel, but slightly less about school practices than do high

TABLE IV.9

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON INDICES OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES BY SCHOOL LEVEL AND OBSERVABILITY

School Level	Personnel		Practices		Number of mothers	
	Observability		Observability		Observability	
	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
Elementary School	50%	33%	58%	34%	(422)	(540)
High School	27	16	63	50	(89)	(341)
Difference	+23	+17	-5	-16		

school mothers.

When school-structured opportunities are limited, however, the gap in knowledge of personnel between elementary and high school mothers remains about constant, but differences in knowledge of school practices between the two groups are increased. In low observability settings elementary school mothers' knowledge of school practices is particularly limited. Only under conditions of high observability are these mothers able to obtain information about school practices. Because high school mothers are likely to be aware of these system practices by the time their children have reached the 10th grade, it is less important that the high school provide extensive communication channels with the home in order for mothers to obtain this kind of information.

Knowledge by Community Type

Since mothers in suburban communities are provided with more opportunities to obtain information regarding schools, and since their participation rates are higher than those of mothers in non-suburban areas, it is surprising to find in Table IV.10 that suburban mothers know no more about school matters than do mothers in any of the other community types, with the exception of the city. This is true for both knowledge of personnel and knowledge of practices and is surprising since rural and small town mothers start out with the handicap of limited school-structured opportunities for knowledge, while such opportunities are extensive in most suburban schools.

TABLE IV.10

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON THE INDICES OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES BY COMMUNITY TYPE

Community Type	Personnel	Practices	Number of mothers
City	20%	34%	(473)
Suburb	40	51	(512)
Town	39	59	(280)
Rural village	44	55	(127)

Since the opportunities provided by the schools differ from one community type to another, Table IV.11 shows how community location is related to parental knowledge when the arrangements for gaining such knowledge are similar. We see that the relationship of observability to parental knowledge is far different in the large city or suburb than in the small town. Formal school-structured opportuni-

TABLE IV.11

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON THE INDICES OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES BY COMMUNITY TYPE AND OBSERVABILITY

Community Type	Personnel		Practices		Number of mothers	
	Observability		Observability		Observability	
	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
City	35%	17%	57%	28%	(92)	(381)
Suburban	50	23	61	31	(336)	(176)
Town	43	38	53	62	(83)	(197)
Rural village	*	44	*	55	(0)	(127)

*There are no high-observability schools in the rural community.

ties seem to make little difference in the level of information of small town mothers, but a great difference in the knowledge of suburban and city mothers. Knowledge of personnel is 18% higher for city mothers and 27% higher for suburban ones when observability is high than when it is low. Similarly 30% more mothers in city and suburban schools rank high on the Index of Practices when observability is high than when it is low.

On the other hand, formal school-structured opportunities for parental knowledge appear to have little relationship to the knowledge of small town mothers. In fact, 9% more small town mothers rank high on the Index of Practices in the low observability schools than in the high ones.

Thus observability appears to be a prerequisite for parental knowledge regarding the schools in the large city or suburb, but irrelevant to the knowledge of mothers in the small town or rural area. When observability is high, the differences in parental knowledge by location which were observed in Table IV.10 are altered, with suburban mothers now ranking highest on both indices of knowledge. Under conditions of low observability, however, we find that knowledge is steadily reduced as we move from the small rural village to the large city.

Size is thus a crucial factor in determining the extent to which organizations require certain formal arrangements to provide information about the norms or characteristics of the group. Such information is more readily obtainable in the small group through the everyday face-to-face contacts, diffuse relationships and informal communication networks which are characteristic of small groups. In the large formal association, however, where impersonal relationships prevail, certain formally-structured channels through which information can be distributed are functional requirements for knowledge.

This is especially true when it is a matter of providing information about an organization to clients of the organization. In the small town or rural community where the school often serves as a center for community activities, parents are more likely to be personally acquainted with teachers and other school personnel, to have more diffuse relationships with other parents, and to have more contact with a number of their children's friends. From these sources they may obtain information about school matters without having to depend on formal school-structured arrangements.

In the large city or suburb the school is only one of a host of formal organizations claiming the attention of the parent. Mothers are apt to have little more than a nodding acquaintance with most school personnel. Diffuse relationships are restricted to a small fraction of one's neighbors and so mothers may have few sources of information about school matters other than the formal opportunities provided by the schools. Suburban school administrators are apparently attempting to provide these opportunities for parents, with the result that suburban mothers in high observability schools have far more knowledge of personnel and practices than suburban mothers in low observability settings. In the large city, however, despite the apparent effectiveness of such channels for increasing mothers' knowledge of school matters, these channels are limited to the one middle-class elementary school. Since the knowledge of mothers in the city seems to suffer most from the absence of these arrangements, city school administrators might take this into account when they want to increase the level of knowledge about these schools.

Some administrators of city schools in relatively deprived neighborhoods might assume that increasing the number of arrangements will have little effect in increasing parental knowledge about the schools. It was seen in Chapter III, however, that while working-class mothers have less contact with the school than do middle-class parents, when opportunities for such contact are extensive, working-class mothers are as likely to utilize these opportunities as are their middle-class counterparts. But perhaps the working-class mother's contact with the school does not produce as much knowledge of school matters as comparable contact of the middle-class parent. The next section presents data that illustrate the relationship to parental knowledge of location in middle- and working-class communities, especially when the degree of observability provided by the school is taken into account.

Knowledge by Socio-Economic Composition of the Community

In Chapter II, we found that school-structured opportunities for parental knowledge are far more extensive in middle- than in working-class communities. Correspondingly, Table IV.12 shows that middle-class mothers have considerably more knowledge of both school personnel and practices than do working-class mothers.

TABLE IV.12

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON THE INDICES OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES BY COMMUNITY SES

Community SES	Personnel	Practices	Number of mothers
Middle-class	46%	66%	(505)
Working-class	27	29	(622)
Difference	19%	37%	

Almost half the mothers in middle-class communities, compared to one-quarter of those in working-class areas, rank high on the Index of Personnel. The difference between the two groups is even greater for knowledge of practices; 2/3 of the mothers in middle-class, compared to less than 1/3 in working-class schools rank high on this dimension of knowledge. That the gap between the two groups is greater for knowledge of practices than for knowledge of personnel may be due to the more abstract nature of school practices. Knupfer, for example, comments on the lack of interest of the lower class individual in abstract matters,[34] and on the fact that the less educated person is far more likely because of timidity and lack of information, to have a higher rate of "don't know" responses on these kinds of items.[35]

Knupfer also comments that lower status individuals are less alert even to matters which do concern them and which might increase their control and enjoyment of life, such as the existence of price ceilings (during World War II) or matters related to income taxes or consumer cooperatives.

> Birth control practices show the same discrepancy; the poor . . . do not avail themselves readily of the services of birth control clinics even when these are accessible. . . .[36]

Knupfer's statement raises a substantive point, namely, the difference between "accessibility" of an arrangement for knowledge and the "socially-structured opportunity" for such knowledge. Birth control clinics are there and accessible to those who wish to visit them. In the same sense, schools are there and parents may visit them, talk to school personnel, and probably obtain information about school matters. The arrangements we have described, however, are "socially-structured opportunities," designed by some schools expressly to invite parental involvement and to raise the level of parental knowledge about school matters. These arrangements are not only available to interested parents, but school personnel, through bulletins, newsletters and notes sent home with the child, make an active effort to encourage parents to utilize these arrangements.

We have seen that when school-structured channels for parental knowledge were provided for working-class mothers, they utilized these channels almost as frequently as did their middle-class counterparts. Correspondingly, Table IV.13 indicates that when the *opportunity* gap between middle- and working-class mothers is eliminated, the *knowledge* gap is substantially reduced, in fact almost eliminated, where knowledge of school personnel is concerned.

Location in a working-class community constitutes almost no handicap for parental knowledge of school personnel, and only a small handicap for knowledge of school practices when the school provides the working-class mother with the same opportunity to obtain information as it does the middle-class parent. The absence of such opportunities, however, has almost no impact on the knowledge of mothers in middle-class communities, but is associated with a reduction in the working-class mother's knowledge of personnel (from 43% to 21%) as well as in her knowledge of school practices (from 48% to 23%). The consequence is a substantial *increase* in the knowledge gap between middle- and working-class mothers.

TABLE IV.13

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON THE INDICES OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES BY COMMUNITY SES AND OBSERVABILITY

Community SES	Personnel		Practices		Number of mothers	
	Observability		Observability		Observability	
	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
Middle-class	48%	42%	64%	71%	(351)	(154)
Working-class	43	21	48	23	(160)	(462)
Difference	-5%	-21%	-16%	-48%		

Apparently thses school-structured arrangements are prerequisites for knowledge of school matters in working-class communities. Their absence or reduction heightens the class differential in parental knowledge. Middle-class mothers may not only have a fuller reservoir of information regarding school matters than do working-class parents, but they also may have readier access to alternative sources of information when school-structured opportunities are limited. Working-class parents, who may possess little information to begin with, also are less likely to have access to alternative sources such as other knowledgeable parents, school officials, or community influentials who might provide them with information about school matters.[37]

Summary

This chapter has analyzed the relationship of school-structured opportunities for parental knowledge and actual parental knowledge. We found that mothers' knowledge of school matters is higher in those schools that provide extensive formal channels between school and home. We also found that observability is especially associated with an increase in the level of knowledge about the school of city and suburban as compared to rural and small town mothers, and of working-class as compared to middle-class parents.

It appears that there are two aspects of the social contexts in which mothers are located which affect their knowledge of school matters: the school level or community type on the one hand, and the observability setting on the other. Both of these are independently related to parental knowledge. But the observability setting appears to have a differential impact on parental knowledge depending upon school level or community location, and depending upon the dimension of knowledge which is involved. A high degree of observability is especially associated with the elementary school mother's knowledge of school practices, but has little impact on this dimension of knowledge for the high school mother. Extensive opportunities are prerequisites for knowledge of mothers in the large city or suburb, but hardly relevant to the knowledge of the small town or rural parent. And finally, the impact of observability on mothers who are located in working-class communities is considerably stronger than it is for those in middle-class areas: traditional class differences in knowledge virtually disappear when observability is high, while the advantageous location of the mother in the middle-class community permits her to maintain a high level of knowledge relative to her working-class counterpart, even when school-structured barriers to such knowledge exist.

We might well ask at this point why knowledge should be greater for mothers in high observability settings. That schools provide extensive opportunities for parents to obtain information is surely no guarantee of increased parental knowledge.

A key intervening variable between the existence of opportunity-structures for knowledge and actual knowledge may be the degree of utilization of such opportunity-structures. If mothers with similar utilization rates have similar knowledge of school matters, regardless of the observability setting, we may conclude that increased opportunities for knowledge which schools may provide are themselves relatively ineffectual in increasing parental knowledge. If, on the other hand, knowledge is higher in those settings where observability is high than it is under conditions of low observability, despite similar amounts of contact, then we must search for some explanation in the climate of those schools which offer extensive opportunities for knowledge.

Chapter V focusses upon contact in order to determine not only its relationship to parental knowledge, but also its relative role, as compared to that of the observability setting, in increasing mothers' levels of information about the schools.

CHAPTER IV

FOOTNOTES

[1] In discussing the differences between the European global approach to the sociology of knowledge and the American empirical emphasis on the sociology of public opinion and mass communication, Merton defines knowledge as that part of public opinion which is "socially certified by particular criteria of evidence" (Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, p. 441). He also states that while the European sociologists were concerned on the cognitive level with *knowledge*, which implies a body of related facts or ideas, American research has dealt primarily with information "which carries no such implication of systematically connected facts or ideas" (*loc. cit.*).

The present investigation is in the American tradition; knowledge is used here to refer to "fragments of information" which mothers have about their children's schools. That these fragments form a generalized pattern still cannot dignify them with the appellation of "knowledge" in the sense of a systematic body of facts and ideas. For our purposes only knowledge which can be objectively "certified by particular criteria of evidence" will be treated, such as knowledge of the teacher's or principal's name, whether the school has certain personnel, or whether certain educational techniques and practices are employed by the school.

[2] Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, p. 341.

[3] Blau, *op. cit.*

[4] T. Hopkins, *The Exercise of Influence in Small Groups*, Totowa, New Jersey: Bedminster Press, 1964.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

[7] Carter, *op. cit.*

[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 74-5.

[9] Glock, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

[10] Hines and Grobman, op. cit., p. 20.

[11] Litwak and Meyer, op. cit., chap. 13.

[12] Katz, E. and Lazarsfeld, P., Personal Influence, Glencoe: The Free Press, 1955. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure, p. 441.

[13] Mothers were asked: In the school system in this community is a child who has not been able to keep up with the rest of the class promoted anyway, rather than having him repeat with a younger group?

[14] Knowledge of the teacher's name is, as expected, substantially higher for elementary than for high school mothers. 90% of the former, but only 40% of the latter, were able to provide the correct name of the teacher. High school mothers were asked the name of the child's English teacher (one of the child's five or six instructors), a more difficult task than providing the name of the elementary school child's single teacher.

[15] Our data show that parents who responded "don't know" to this practice were primarily those who had children in grades where the New Math had not as yet been incorporated into the curriculum.

[16] For example, 35% of the mothersthink that skipping is a "good idea" but 57% are opposed to this practice.

[17] A. Campbell et al., The American Voter (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1960), p. 171.

[18] Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure, p. 375.

[19] L. Schneider, op. cit.

[20] H. G. Erskine, "The Polls: The Informed Public," Public Opinion Quarterly, XXVI (Winter, 1962), pp. 669-77.

[21] H. G. Erskine, "The Polls: Exposure to Domestic Information," Public Opinion Quarterly, XXVI (Fall, 1963), pp. 491-500.

[22] These will be referred to in the balance of the analysis as the "Index of Personnel" and the "Index of Practices."

[23] See Table IV.1 for school personnel and practice items. Because of technical considerations the percentage of "don't know" responses is taken as an indicator of mothers' knowledge of those personnel and practices items which were not universal among the schools in

the sample. 46% of the mothers had no "don't know" responses regarding selected school personnel; 48% had one or no "don't know" responses on the practice items. Both groups include a very small percentage of mothers who may have responded inaccurately.

[24] See Table IV.1 for school practices.

[25] The Palestine Report of the Anglo-American Committee on Palestine which recommended the admission of 100,000 Jewish immigrants to that country appeared in 1946.

[26] Hyman and Sheatsley, op. cit., p. 165.

[27] Ibid., p. 164.

[28] Loc. cit.

[29] Glock and his colleagues found that 36% of their respondents were unable to answer any questions regarding the Eichmann trial (Glock, et al., op. cit., p. 28), and Hyman and Sheatsley reported that 14% of their sample were unaware of even one of five issues about which they were questioned (Hyman and Sheatsley, op. cit., p. 165). We recognize that our results are an artifact of the categories we have established by using certain cutting-point. While they cannot be compared with the findings of other studies, they do indicate that considerable percentage of parents has only limited knowledge of school matters.

[30] Hyman and Sheatsley, op. cit., p. 165.

[31] Ibid., pp. 165-6.

[32] Katz and Lazarsfeld, op. cit., p. 272.

[33] P. Converse, "Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes," Public Opinion Quarterly, XXVI (Winter, 1962), p. 582.

[34] Knupfer, op. cit.

[35] Ibid., p. 261.

[36] Loc. cit. (emphasis mine).

[37] In Chapter VII we will examine some of the alternative sources of knowledge which parents utilize to obtain information about the school, especially when school-structured channels are limited.

CHAPTER V

OBSERVABILITY, CONTACT, AND PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE

Although the level of parental knowledge about the school is substantially higher in high than in low observability settings, it cannot be assumed that merely providing such arrangements is enough to produce this result. Many factors may intervene between the opportunity for knowledge and actual knowledge.

Chapter III analyzed mothers' rates of utilization of observability arrangements provided by the school on the assumption that the primary intervening variable between opportunity for knowledge and actual knowledge is contact. Public opinion research finds that people who expose themselves to campaign propaganda, read newspapers, listen to political speeches, or attend election rallies know more about the candidates and issues than do those who remain unexposed.[1] It is reasonable to suppose, in the same way, that mothers who participate in school gatherings, who attend PTA meetings, and Back-to-School Nights, and other such occasions, will also be better informed about the school than their counterparts with little or no contact.

Observability itself might, however, contribute little to actual knowledge when contact is introduced as an intervening variable; that is, mothers with high rates of contact with the school may have high knowledge scores whether these contacts are formally provided for or not. If contact mediates between opportunities for knowledge and actual knowledge we may expect results as follows:

FIGURE V.1

EXPECTED RATES OF PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE BY CONTACT AND OBSERVABILITY: ASSUMPTION 1

Observability	Contact	
	High	Low
High	High	Low
Low	High.	Low

That is, regardless of the extent to which the school institutionalizes certain arrangements for parental observability, high contact should be associated with much knowledge, and low contact with little knowledge about school matters. The relationship between observability and knowledge would be entirely accounted for by the extent of parental contact.

This model, however, does not consider the possibility that observability itself may produce increments in parental knowledge beyond that produced by contact with the school. It is possible that the school that offers extensive opportunities for parents to become informed about school matters may differ from the school which restricts such opportunities.

In Chapter III it was seen that attendance at PTA meetings or Back-to-School Night was higher in high observability schools than in low ones, even when these arrangements were available in the low observability schools. It was suggested then that the normative climate of the high observability school is one which encourages such participation and possibly generates informal networks and channels reinforcing the tendency to participate in school events. Similarly, it may be that in such climates, parental knowledge will also be reinforced and that we may predict the following relationship between observability, contact, and knowledge:

FIGURE V.2

EXPECTED RATES OF PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE BY CONTACT AND OBSERVABILITY: ASSUMPTION 2

Observability	Contact	
	High	Low
High	High	Medium-Low[2]
Low	Medium-High[2]	Low

This model assumes that while mothers' contacts, regardless of the social climate of schools, produce increments in knowledge about the school, the observability climate itself (partly expressed in providing formal opportunities for observability) will have an additional effect on mothers' knowledge of school matters. This assumption is based on the findings of previous studies which have investigated the effects of individual and contextual properties on a variable.

Wilson, for example, found that an individual's achievement and aspiration levels are related both to his own social class and to the average social class of the school he attends; that, in other words, the social class climate of a school makes its own contribution to the achievement and aspiration of its pupils, beyond that made by the individual social class climate of the home.[3] Similarly, Berelson and Freedman, reporting on the results of a birth control campaign in Formosa, found that the percentage of married women, age 20 to 39, accepting birth control was higher for those who were visited personally than for those approached by mail or not approached at all. But the percentage of women who responded varied not only with the type of individual coverage but with the density of coverage in the area. That is, when coverage in the locality was dense (half the households visited) more women who were themselves visited responded by accepting birth control than did women who were visited in localities where coverage was limited to 1/5 of the households. Thus the contextual property (density of coverage in the area) had a "spillover effect" on acceptance of treatment, in addition to the effect of the individual property (whether the woman herself was visited, approached by mail, or not approached).[4]

In discussing the joint effects of family and neighborhood SES on children's reading scores, Litwak and Meyer found that the socio-economic level of the neighborhood had an effect beyond that of the family's own socio-economic position. That is, the reading scores of children of middle-class parents were higher if the family resided in a middle-class than in a working-class neighborhood. The authors interpret this finding by suggesting:

> The better the circumstances of the family, the more able it is to utilize any social advantage it is given . . . a well

> educated family can better maximize its advantage over a poorly educated one in a good neighborhood than it can in a poor neighborhood. . . . Where families are depressed below a certain level, . . . they cannot utilize their social advantages (education, race, or neighborhood) to the highest degree.[5]

Evidence of this kind suggests that the contextual property of observability might have an effect on parental knowledge in addition to that of contact. Before examining the joint effects of observability and contact on mothers' knowledge, let us first see the extent to which formal contact with the school is itself related to the level of information of parent-clients.

Knowledge by Formal Contact

Chapter III examined the formal school contacts of mothers. Mothers were ranked high on an Index of Formal School Contact when they had attended at least two of the following school-provided channels: Back-to-School Night, PTA, or Scheduled Conferences for All Parents. 52% of the mothers ranked high, and 48% low, on this Index.

School personnel are explicitly attempting to increase parental knowledge by drawing parents to the school through these organizational arrangements. As one administrator states:

> Open houses, parent nights, and school programs which bring the parents into the school offer opportunity to the public to learn at first hand what is being taught in the schools.[6]

Similarly, Bortner suggests:

> School officials in each community should organize an effective program of public relations as a means both for keeping the public well-informed concerning needs, problems, aims, and programs of the schools and for keeping themselves informed concerning lay opinion as it related to the schools. Such programs . . . should help to increase lay confidence in and support of the schools.[7]

Does increased contact with the school make a difference in parental knowledge, as these school officials assume? And perhaps more interesting, are some kinds of information more readily obtained through contact with the schools than other kinds of information? Are some arrangements associated more than others with the level of parental knowledge?

TABLE V.1

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON THE INDICES OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES BY CONTACT

Rank on the Index of Formal School Contact	Index of Personnel	Index of Practices	Number of Mothers
High	47%	55%	(690)
Low	21	39	(702)
Difference	+26%	+16%	

Table V.1 shows that mothers with much contact have more knowledge of school personnel and school practices than do mothers ranking low on contact. It shows, too, that formal contact is less related to knowledge of practices than to knowledge of personnel. Perhaps attendance at a PTA meeting or a Back-to-School Night enables mothers at least to learn of the existence of certain school personnel (who may be introduced or referred to at such gatherings) while such contacts are not as likely to increase knowledge of school practices, unless these practices are themselves topics of discussion at these meetings.

TABLE V.2

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON THE INDICES OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES BY ATTENDANCE AT SCHEDULED CONFERENCES, BACK-TO-SCHOOL NIGHT, AND PTA

Mother attended	Scheduled Conferences			Back-to-School Night			PTA		
	Personnel	Practices	Number of mothers*	Personnel	Practices	Number of mothers	Personnel	Practices	Number of mothers
Yes	46%	46%	(554)	43%	55%	(633)	47%	57%	(591)
No	26	42	(395)	24	39	(628)	21	38	(671)
Difference	+20%	+4%		+19%	+16%		+26%	+19%	

*Elementary school mothers only

Are certain kinds of formal contact with the school more likely than others to be associated with an increase in the level of parental knowledge? Table V.2 indicates that attendance at PTA yields the highest knowledge scores (for both personnel and practices) while those mothers who have never attended a PTA meeting have lower scores on these two dimensions of knowledge than mothers who failed to attend scheduled conferences or Back-to-School Night. That PTA attendance is associated with higher scores on the two indices of knowledge than are attendance at Back-to-School Night and Scheduled Conferences may be a spurious finding. We have already seen that attendance at PTA meetings is more typical of the better-educated mothers than of the less-educated ones (Chapter III) and that mothers who have attended college know more about school personnel and practices than their non-college counterparts (Chapter IV). Table V.3 shows, however, that our finding is not spurious; the knowledge scores of college mothers who have attended a PTA meeting are considerably higher than the scores of college mothers reporting no such attendance.

TABLE V.3

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON THE INDICES OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES BY ATTENDANCE AT A PTA MEETING AND EDUCATION

Attended PTA	Knowledge of Personnel Education			Knowledge of Practices Education		
	College	Non-College	Difference	College	Non-College	Difference
Yes	56% (333)	39% (327)	+17%	68% (333)	46% (327)	+22%
No	29 (165)	18 (551)	+11%	52 (165)	35 (551)	+17%
Difference	+27%	+21%		+16%	+11%	

In fact, attending a PTA meeting makes more of a difference than education in mothers' knowledge of school personnel, slightly less difference for knowledge of school practices. All three arrangements, when utilized, are associated with about a 20% increase in the rate of knowledge of school personnel (Table V.2). Attendance at a scheduled conference, however, is unrelated to mothers' knowledge of school practices.

The scheduled conference is usually reserved for discussion of the child's problems and progress[8] and school practices are seldom discussed at such conferences. Nor is there much opportunity for a mother to talk informally with other parents when she attends a scheduled conference. At a Back-to-School Night, however, and even more, at a PTA meeting, specific school practices are often subjects of discussion at the meeting itself, and the conversations over coffee during the social hour following these meetings may be fruitful sources of information regarding these practices. School administrators might infer from this that while the scheduled conference offers the parent an opportunity to confer privately with the child's teacher, the PTA seems a more effective arrangement for transmitting general knowledge about school matters.[9]

Observability, Contact, and Parental Knowledge

We have seen that under conditions of high observability mothers have more knowledge regarding school personnel and practices than when observability is low. We have also seen that formal contact with the school, or utilization of opportunities for knowledge, discriminates the more from the less knowledgeable mothers. Is it possible, since in Chapter III we found that formal contacts are substantially higher in high observability settings than in low, that contact alone, rather than contact and observability jointly, is accounting for the increased level of parental knowledge?

TABLE V.4

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON COMBINED INDICES
OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES BY CONTACT
AND OBSERVABILITY

Contact	Observability		
	High	Low	Difference
High	40% (384)	24% (306)	+16%
Low	17 (127)	11 (575)	+6%
Difference	+23%	+13%	

The answer to this question is shown in Table V.4 which presents the joint effect on mothers' total knowledge of contact and observability. As predicted, contact has greater impact than observability on parental knowledge. Mothers with high rates of contact rank higher on knowledge, regardless of observability setting, than do mothers with low contact rates. On the other hand, given equal amounts of contact, observability has a "spillover effect" on mothers' knowledge. Mothers with high contact have a 16% higher rate of knowledge when they are located in high observability schools than in schools with limited observability. Contact alone is not sufficient, therefore, to account for differences in mothers' knowledge. The structural property of observability also contributes to parental knowledge, beyond the contribution of contact.

Perhaps more interesting than the joint effects of contact and observability on total knowledge, is their relationship to the two separate kinds of knowledge, that is, knowledge of personnel and knowledge of practices. In Table V.1 we saw that contact has less impact on mothers' knowledge of school practices than on their knowledge of personnel. Observability, on the other hand, is associated with about the same increase on both dimensions of knowledge (Table IV.4(A)). Are the joint effects of contact and observability different for knowledge of personnel than for knowledge of school practices? In Table V.5 we see the proportion of mothers who rank high on the Indices of Personnel and Practices, with both contact and observability controlled.

TABLE V.5

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON INDICES
OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES BY
CONTACT AND OBSERVABILITY

Contact	Index of Personnel			Index of Practices		
	Observability			Observability		
	High	Low	Difference	High	Low	Difference
High	52% (384)	40% (306)	+12%	65% (384)	40% (306)	+25%
Low	28 (127)	19 (575)	+9%	43 (127)	39 (575)	+4%
Difference	+14%	+21%		+22%	+1%	

It is obvious that the contextual property of observability has a spillover effect on mothers' knowledge of both personnel and practices when contact is held constant. 12% fewer mothers rank high on the Index of Personnel, and 25% fewer on the Index of Practices, when observability is low than when it is high -- when these mothers have had regular contact with the school.

When mothers' contact rates are low, however, the spillover effect of observability on knowledge of personnel is reduced, and, on knowledge of practices, eliminated. Only those who have the advantage of multiple school-structured arrangements and who utilize these arrangements, rank high on the Index of Practices. High contact in low observability settings is barely related to information regarding school practices; nor is the existence of a high observability climate without accompanying contact.

Why, given similar frequency of contact, is parental knowledge generally greater in high than in low observability settings? Is there something in the social climate of those schools which maintain an Open Door Policy which permits a level of information beyond that obtained through direct formal contact?

In Chapter III we found that mothers utilized each formally-structured opportunity provided by schools more extensively when an Open Door Policy existed than when opportunities were limited. That is, more mothers attended PTA meetings or Back-to-School Night when other opportunities were also available than when these were the only arrangements provided. It was suggested at that time that the normative climate of schools providing high observability might be one which encourages mothers to utilize each opportunity. This in turn may lead to the existence and reinforcement of informal networks of mothers through which information regarding school matters is generated.[10] The informal networks established through regular utilization of school-structured channels may then have a spillover effect on the information level of those mothers who do not utilize these channels regularly.

Furthermore, schools with an Open Door Policy, which supposedly place a higher normative premium on parental knowledge, may also be providing other arrangements to increase school-home communication, such as frequent bulletins sent home with the child, parent-teacher teas, or Open Houses.

It is significant that the five schools in our sample which held an Open School Week all rank high on the Observability Index, as does the one school which reported holding regular parent-teacher teas. Perhaps when parents do not utilize the formally-structured arrangements comprising our Observability Index, they may be kept informed through other arrangements which are more numerous in the Open Door Schools.

While the above explanation may account in part for the fact that observability has an effect on parental knowledge beyond that of contact, it does not account for this holding for knowledge of personnel, but not for knowledge of practices.

Why, as was seen in Table V.5, are the joint effects of observability and contact on mothers' knowledge different, depending on the dimension of knowledge? Why, in other words, does observability have a spillover effect on mothers' knowledge of personnel, regardless of whether contact is extensive or limited, but no such effect on knowledge of school practices when contact is limited?

In Chapter IV we suggested that, with the exception of the New Math, school practices constitute a dimension of knowledge which is less concrete, less relevant and therefore generally less visible to parents. Furthermore, it was suggested in Chapter IV that educational administrators and teachers may be restricting the visibility of certain school practices. It is unlikely, therefore, that the existence of an Open Door Policy is sufficient to generate a high informational level regarding these practices, unless accompanied by a high rate of parental contact. At the same time, contact with these schools which provide only limited observability arrangements may not be sufficient to promote parental knowledge about these practices. Both an Open Door Policy and a high rate of contact are requirements for knowledge of school practices. Either an Open Door Policy or a high rate of contact, however, is sufficient for parents to obtain information about the more visible school personnel, although contact appears to contribute more to this dimension of parental knowledge than does observability.

One explanation then for the fact that the joint effects of observability and contact are somewhat different for knowledge of personnel than for knowledge of practices may lie in the differences inherent in these two kinds of knowledge. Another explanation, however, may be that certain attributes, which are themselves related to parental knowledge rates, differentiate mothers who have high or low contact within each of the observability settings.

After all, a high rate of contact is to be expected when the school maintains an Open Door Policy. Opportunities to attend school meetings are extensive and it is hardly surprising to find that the majority of mothers takes advantage of these opportunities.

A high rate of contact in a low observability setting, however, is a different matter for it means that mothers are utilizing each of the arrangements provided. It is possible that mothers with high contact rates where observability arrangements are limited may be distinguished by deep interest in school matters or strong convictions as to their relevance.

Similarly, a mother with a low contact rate, even when school-structured opportunities are extensive, may be very different from her counterpart with a low contact score when such opportunities are limited. In the first instance, the mother is rejecting the Open Door Policy; in the second, she is passively accepting the absence of opportunity. In other words, both high and low contact scores must be seen in the light of the opportunity-structure provided by the school, for there may be significant differences between mothers who have similar rates of contact but who are located in different observability settings.

The following chapter examines characteristics which differentiate mothers who have high or low contact rates within each of the observability settings. Such an analysis may explain variations in parental knowledge about the school.

CHAPTER V

FOOTNOTES

[1] Lazarsfeld, et al. report that those who participated in the campaign and exposed themselves to political propaganda were also able to express opinions regarding the candidates, and knew their stands on relevant issues. (See Lazarsfeld, et al., op. cit., chap. 5.) Glock reports that the more sources of information about the Eichman trial people reported utilizing, the more they knew various details about the trial. (See Glock, et al., op. cit., pp. 48-50.)

[2] We are assuming, as Figure V.2 indicates, that contact will be more related than observability to mothers' knowledge of school matters. Thus, mothers with high contact in low observability settings should have higher knowledge scores than mothers with low contact in high observability settings.

[3] A. Wilson, "Class Segregation and Aspirations of Youth," American Sociological Review, XXIV (December, 1959), pp. 836-845.

[4] B. Berelson and R. Freedman, "A Study in Fertility Control," Scientific American (May, 1964), pp. 29-36.

[5] Litwak and Meyer, op. cit., p. 97. This finding may be spurious, since middle-class families living in a working-class neighborhood may constitute a sub-group or section of a working-class neighborhood. It may be that the social climate of the middle-class "sub-neighborhood" is accounting for the spillover effect on reading scores.

[6] Cooper, op. cit., p. 341.

[7] D. M. Bortner, "A Study of Published Lay Opinion on Educational Programs and Problems," Education (June, 1951), p. 649.

[8] See Chapter II for a description of the three arrangements.

[9] Chapter VII will show that certain kinds of informal contacts are more highly related to mothers' knowledge of school practices than

are formal contacts.

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[10] Mothers who attend school gatherings regularly are more likely to designate themselves as "opinion leaders" who are frequently questioned about school matters. The Open Door Policy may produce a "two-stop flow" of information to the general parent body, thus accounting perhaps for the "spillover-effect" of observability.

CHAPTER VI

UTILIZERS, REJECTORS, STRIVERS, AND NON-STRIVERS

In Chapter V we found that the rate of formal contact with the school was closely related to mothers' knowledge about school matters. We also found, however, that for every degree of contact, observability alone still exercised an influence on mothers' knowledge of personnel, though not of practices. It was suggested that inherent differences in these two dimensions of knowledge might partly account for this result. Furthermore, it was suggested that in order to interpret the joint effects of contact and the observability on mothers' knowledge, we must ask: what kinds of mothers have low contact scores even though the school provides extensive observability arrangements, and conversely, what kinds of mothers have high contact scores even when the school provides only limited observability arrangements?

Chapter III showed that most mothers have high contact rates when observability is high and low ones when observability is low. This is hardly surprising, nor even particularly interesting. What is interesting, however, is the fact that a considerable number of mothers ranks high on the Index of Formal School Contact even when observability arrangements are limited, and low on this Index when an Open Door Policy is maintained. Combining the individual property of contact and the contextual property of observability yields four types of mothers:

FIGURE VI.1

FOUR TYPES OF MOTHERS BY TYPE OF OBSERVABILITY-CONTACT

Formal Contact	Observability	
	High	Low
High	Type I	Type III
Low	Type II	Type IV

Type I utilizes fully the several arrangements provided by the school. For reader identification we shall call her a Utilizer. Type II fails to take advantage of her high observability setting. She will be called a Rejector. Despite the fact that Type III is provided with only limited observability arrangements, she maintains a high rate of contact with the school. We shall call her a Striver. Finally, we have Type IV, who fails to overcome the handicap of limited observability -- the Non-Striver. In Table VI.1 we see the distribution of these four types of mothers in the sample.

TABLE VI.1

DISTRIBUTION OF MOTHERS BY TYPE OF OBSERVABILITY-CONTACT

Contact	Observability	
	High	Low
High	Utilizers (28%)[a]	Strivers (22%)
Low	Rejectors (9%)	Non-Strivers (41%)

[a] N = 1,392

Table VI.1 shows that almost one-third of the mothers fall into the two deviant categories; 22% are strivers, maintaining high rates of contact, despite limited opportunity, and 9% are rejectors failing to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the school.

These types are hardly unique to schools. Every social system includes people for whom certain opportunities for access to power, social mobility, knowledge, or rewards of any kind are readily available, and who utilize the channels at their disposal to achieve culturally approved ends. It also includes individuals who fail to take advantage of such opportunities either because they reject them as means to their ends, or because they reject the approved ends for themselves.[1] A case in point are the middle class youth who shun the socially prescribed channels for maintaining or improving their middle-class status, such as good grades and behavior in school, and decide to go "hippie." For others in the social system, the socially prescribed channels for the achievement of upward mobility are less readily available. Like Kahl's "common-man boys," however, there are always those who are pressured by their own or parental values and aspirations to utilize to the utmost whatever limited channels do exist.[2]

In the same way, some parents have more extensive opportunities for participation in school gatherings than others. Some fail to utilize these socially-structured opportunities; others overcome the handicap of limited opportunity and maintain a high degree of contact with the school.[3] Martin comments that the suburban resident

> . . . has greater accessibility than the central city dweller to the social interaction opportunities of the rural farm population. Most available of all are the interaction opportunities of his own relatively small, homogeneous, suburban

> community, which ordinarily has the characteristics usually associated with 'neighboring' and other informal primary-type group contacts.[4]

The greater opportunity for informal social participation in small town and suburban communities is shown in the research findings of their higher rate of "neighboring" than in the large city.[5] The same studies report that some residents do not utilize the opportunities for contact in the small town or suburb, just as others in the relative anonymity of the urban setting engage in extensive neighboring. A study in 1955, for example, found that neighboring was widespread in the Detroit area. About 75% of the responding families reported that they "got together" with neighbors (aside from relatives) at least a few times a month.[6]

All this leads to the same observation. Social structure or ecological position may influence the extent of opportunities (e.g. for upward mobility, for neighboring, or for obtaining information about school matters) but some people reject available opportunities and others exert extra effort in order to utilize the limited opportunities that do exist.

What, then, are the characteristics that distinguish utilizers from strivers, rejectors from non-strivers? An answer to this question should serve two purposes. First, it may help explain the finding that the combination of observability and contact is associated in one way with mothers' knowledge of school personnel but in another with their knowledge of school practices.

Of much broader import, however, the analysis of the characteristics of these types may help us understand the more general problem of observability in social systems. We assume that a certain amount of observability is functional for the social integration of individuals just as it is for the social integration of organizations. Both individuals and organizations have certain means of making their norms and role performances visible to their "publics." In the family or small informal group this may be accomplished through the everyday communication networks that arise from the frequent interaction of members. In the large organization, arrangements for such visibility are more formally structured and consciously utilized. It is important for an organization to assess the extent to which such arrangements are utilized to produce awareness of norms and role-performances and to identify the kinds of people who reject available opportunities or who seek more opportunities than the limited number offered by the organization.

This chapter examines some characteristics of the four types of mothers (utilizer, rejector, striver, or non-striver) that may account for mothers becoming one or another type and that may help explain the variations in parental knowledge of school matters set forth in Chapter V.

For ready reference, Table VI.2 reorganizes the data of Table V.5 in terms of the four types of mothers.

The utilizers clearly have higher knowledge scores than the other types of mothers. The combination of an Open Door Policy and high utilization of the available opportunities is associated with a high rate of parental knowledge about the school. Except for knowledge of school practices, strivers have the next highest rates, followed by

TABLE VI.2

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON THE INDEX OF PERSONNEL, THE INDEX OF PRACTICES, AND ON THE COMBINED INDICES OF KNOWLEDGE BY TYPE OF OBSERVABILITY-CONTACT

Type of Mother	Personnel	Practices	Combined Indices	Number of mothers
Utilizer	52%	65%	40%	(384)
Rejector	28	43	17	(127)
Striver	40	40	24	(306)
Non-Striver	19	39	11	(575)

rejectors, with the non-strivers ranking lowest.[7]

In Chapters II and III, we found that formal observability arrangements are neither universally distributed nor universally utilized. Mothers residing in working-class areas were generally provided with few arrangements for obtaining information about the school, while mothers in middle-class communities were given many. Taking the educational background of the family as an indicator of the socio-economic position of the mother, we found that college mothers were advantageously located in Open Door schools, while their non-college counterparts were generally located in school districts offering only limited observability arrangements.

Is it possible, therefore, that the spillover effect on parental knowledge of observability is an artifact of the predominance of college-educated families in the high observability settings? The better educated parent may have a large reservoir of school-related information and this may explain why mothers in high observability settings are more knowledgeable than those in low ones, even when utilization rates are held constant.

Education and the Four Types

TABLE VI.3

TYPES OF OBSERVABILITY-CONTACT AND EDUCATION

Type of Mother	College	Non-College	All Mothers
Utilizer	64%	36%	(384)
Non-Utilizer	38	62	(127)
Striver	30	70	(306)
Non-Striver	21	79	(575)
All Mothers	(37%)	(63%)	(1392)

Table VI.3 shows that while college mothers represent only about one-third of the sample population, they comprise almost two-thirds of the utilizers. Non-college parents constitute almost two-thirds of the entire sample, but account for four-fifths of the non-strivers. We know that the better educated mothers are also more knowledgeable (see Chapter IV). Is their overrepresentation in the first, and their underrepresentation in the last category accounting for the spillover effect of observability on mothers' knowledge about the school?

Table VI.4 presents the knowledge scores of the four types of mothers, with educational background held constant. The joint effects of observability and contact on parental knowledge differ for college and non-college mothers. Observability, or the opportunity-structure provided by the school, is related more to the knowledge of the non-college mother than the college one. In fact, for college mothers, observability makes no difference at all in knowledge of school

TABLE VI.4

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON THE INDICES OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES BY TYPE OF OBSERVABILITY-CONTACT AND EDUCATION

Type of Mother	Knowledge of Personnel		Knowledge of Practices		Number of Mothers	
	College	Non-College	College	Non-College	College	Non-College
Utilizer	55%	47%	70%	56%	(246)	(137)
Rejector	31	27	44	38	(48)	(79)
Striver	55	34	56	38	(91)	(215)
Non-Striver	31	10	58	34	(116)	(453)
All Mothers	47%	26%	62%	39%	(501)	(884)

personnel; the difference among the four types of college mothers are entirely due to contact. While 55% of the college mothers with high contact rank high on the Index of Personnel, both in high and low observability settings, only 31% of the college mothers with low contact in either of the observability settings rank high on this Index.

For non-college mothers, however, observability makes some difference beyond that made by contact. We find that 13% fewer non-college strivers rank high on knowledge of school personnel than do utilizers, and 17% fewer non-strivers have high knowledge of personnel than do rejectors. That observability has a spillover effect on mothers' knowledge of personnel for non-college, but not for college mothers is contrary to our expectations. We had suspected that the spillover effect of observability on mothers' knowledge was spurious because of the overrepresentation of college educated parents in high observability settings. We find, however, when we control for educational background, that this spillover effect obtains for the non-college but not at all for the college mothers' knowledge of school personnel.

In short, while observability appears to be a requirement for informing the less educated mothers about school personnel, it is only successful if utilized. On the other hand, for college mothers, contact alone accounts for knowledge rates, regardless of the extent to which formal arrangements for such knowledge are provided by the schools.

Why do college mothers with low contact in high observability settings know as little as do their counterparts in low observability settings about school personnel. Similarly, why do the college rejectors, despite their location in schools that are maintaining an Open Door Policy, have the lowest score of all college mothers on the Index of Practices? As Table VI.4 indicates, only 44% of the college rejectors rank high in this dimension of knowledge compared to 58% of the college non-strivers. Why are the knowledge scores of college rejectors, who have the advantage of location in high observability settings relatively depressed?

The answer may emerge if we examine selected socio-psychological characteristics of college rejectors which seem to differentiate them from other college and non-college mothers. The next sections look specifically at differences in their interest in school matters, educational expectations for their children, and general community participation patterns.

Interest and the Four Types

Public opinion studies find that failure to utilize available mass media channels is associated with little interest in political matters or other current issues. The authors of The People's Choice report, for example, that those who failed to utilize the mass media for information regarding the 1940 presidential campaign not only had fewer opinions about the campaign, but also evidenced little or no interest in it.[8] School matters are presumably of greater interest to mothers of school children than are public affairs to the general population. Still, we expect that the mothers who report deep interest in school matters will be those who regularly attend school gatherings.

TABLE VI.5

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO ARE "VERY INTERESTED" IN SCHOOL MATTERS BY TYPE OF OBSERVABILITY-CONTACT AND EDUCATION

Type of Mother	Education		All Mothers
	College	Non-College	
Utilizer	84% (238)	70% (130)	79% (368)
Rejector	75 (48)	66 (74)	69 (122)
Striver	81 (91)	76 (212)	77 (303)
Non-Striver	72 (111)	66 (441)	67 (552)
Totals	80% (488)	69% (857)	73% (1345)

We also expect college mothers to report somewhat greater interest in school affairs than do non-college mothers. Lipset ascribes the greater interest and participation in politics of the more educated to their superior ability to recognize the relevance of such matters to their own lives.[9] Correspondingly, the better educated parent may be more aware of the importance of education as a requirement for upward mobility.

Table VI.5 confirms both expectations. Utilizers and strivers resemble one another in their reported interest about school matters, as do rejectors and the non-strivers. In every instance, those with high contact scores (utilizers and strivers) report more interest than do those with low contact scores, confirming studies which find that it is the more interested person who exposes himself to campaign programs and propaganda, to informative campaign material, to newspapers, etc.[10]

Similarly, college mothers report somewhat greater interest in school matters than non-college ones (80% to 69%). This is true for each type of mother. Among college mothers the highest interest is reported by utilizers, followed by strivers, rejectors and finally non-strivers. For non-college mothers, however, the pattern changes; _the most interested mothers are the strivers_, that is, those who utilize whatever limited opportunities for knowledge the schools provide. As a matter of fact, although in each category, college mothers report higher interest than do non-college mothers, non-college _strivers_ are as interested in school matters as college rejectors and college non-strivers. It may be that a relatively high degree of interest is required for the non-college mother to make the effort that is necessary to participate in school affairs when opportunities are limited. College mothers who have high contact under conditions of low observability may be motivated less by interest than by the normative standards of the more highly educated, i.e. that one "should" participate in school affairs.

In Chapter IV we saw that reported interest in school matters was only slightly related to mothers' knowledge about the school. Accordingly, while our four categories highlight whatever differences in parental interest exist, these variations are not sufficient to account for the differences in knowledge of the four groups. We proceed to examine other differences between utilizers, rejectors, strivers, and non-strivers.

Relevance of School Matters and the Four Types of Mothers

Some have suggested that participation in politics and knowledge of political matters are related to the relevance of such matters for the individual. Wheat farmers who are affected by government policies tend to have high voting rates,[11] and families of union members are more knowledgeable than families of non-union members in such matters as the Taft-Hartley Law or the guaranteed wage.[12] One indicator of the relevance of school matters to mothers is whether they expect their children to continue their education past high school. We might expect that mothers with high educational expectations for their children will be more motivated to know about school matters and to attend school gatherings even when arrangements for parental observability are limited.

Table VI.6 shows that this is only partly so. Among both college and non-college parents, the highest educational expectations are held by utilizers. While we expected that the strivers, who have overcome the handicap of limited observability, would hold relatively

TABLE VI.6

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO EXPECT THEIR CHILDREN TO COMPLETE FOUR YEARS OF COLLEGE OR MORE BY TYPE OF OBSERVABILITY-CONTACT AND EDUCATION

Type of Mother	Education		All Mothers
	College	Non-College	
Utilizer	81% (238)	48% (130)	69% (368)
Rejector	67 (48)	33 (74)	46 (122)
Striver	67 (91)	38 (212)	47 (303)
Non-Striver	68 (111)	28 (441)	36 (552)
Totals	74% (488)	34% (857)	48% (1345)

high educational expectations, this was not found to be true. Although non-college strivers have slightly higher expectations than non-college rejectors and non-strivers, educational expectations appear to be more a function of a mother's own educational background than of her participation in school affairs.

Still, the non-college strivers appear to be more highly motivated than other non-college types. Among non-college mothers they display the highest rate of interest in school matters, and the second highest rate of educational expectations for their children. Conversely, among college mothers, rejectors have the second lowest rate of interest and hold relatively low educational expectations for their children. Let us bear this in mind as we analyze differences in general community participation patterns among the four types of mothers.

General Community Participation and the Four Types of Mothers

Perhaps the low contact rates of mothers, especially of those mothers in settings where observability arrangements are extensive, are part of a more general non-participation complex. Voting studies, for example, have found that those who absent themselves from the polls on election day are less likely than voters to be members of non-political associations.[13]

Similarly, Deutsch and Collins found that white tenants who reported little or no interaction with Negroes in their housing project, also claimed fewer white friends and were less well-integrated in the general life of the project.[14]

It may be then that the rejection of observability arrangements is associated with general non-participation in community affairs. We have no data on mothers' membership or participation in formal organizations other than PTA. We do, however, have several other indicators of participation in community activities. Table VI.7 shows the voting rates of the four types of mothers in the 1964 presidential election and in the most recent school election, and their rates of "neighboring."

The outstanding finding of Table VI.7 is that on every indicator of general community participation the rejectors have the lowest rates of all four groups. Fewer rejectors than any other type of mother voted in the 1964 presidential election or the most recent school election, and rejectors engage in "neighboring" at a lower rate than do utilizers, strivers, and non-strivers.

This tendency for rejection of observability arrangements and low rates of community participation to go hand-in-hand, is particularly

TABLE VI.7

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO VOTED IN LAST PRESIDENTIAL AND SCHOOL ELECTIONS AND WHO ENGAGE IN "NEIGHBORING" WEEKLY OR MORE BY TYPE OF OBSERVABILITY-CONTACT AND EDUCATION

a. Voted in 1964 Presidential Election

Type of Mother	Education		All Mothers
	College	Non-College	
Utilizer	92% (238)	81% (130)	88% (368)
Rejector	77 (48)	81 (74)	79 (122)
Striver	91 (91)	88 (212)	88 (303)
Non-Striver	94 (111)	80 (442)	83 (553)
Totals	91% (488)	82% (858)	85% (1346)

b. Voted in Last School Election

Type of Mother	Education		All Mothers
	College	Non-College	
Utilizer	65% (221)	58% (79)	63% (300)
Rejector	30 (40)	25 (55)	27 (95)
Striver	60 (83)	39 (193)	45 (276)
Non-Striver	37 (99)	29 (414)	30 (513)
Totals	55% (443)	34% (741)	42% (1184)[a]

c. Visits Neighbors Weekly or More

Type of Mother	Education		All Mothers
	College	Non-College	
Utilizer	40% (246)	47% (136)	43% (382)
Rejector	39 (48)	25 (77)	30 (125)
Striver	43 (91)	47 (214)	46 (305)
Non-Striver	39 (116)	38 (448)	38 (565)
Totals	40% (501)	41% (875)	40% (1377)

[a] Total number of mothers is smaller because mothers in one community, where no school elections have been held, have been excluded.

evident among college mothers. While 91% of the college mothers voted in the 1964 presidential election, the turnout rate of college rejectors was only 77%. Similarly, while there are no differences in the "neighboring" rates of the four types of college mothers, college rejectors have the lowest turnout rate at school elections.

In contrast, among the less educated mothers, the non-college strivers (whom we have suggested are a more motivated and active group compared to other non-college parents) have a slightly higher turnout rate at the 1964 polls than other non-college parents, are tied with the utilizers for the highest rate of "neighboring," and are second to the utilizers as far as voting in school elections is concerned.

These data show that there are very real differences among our four categories of mothers. While the most highly motivated, participant mothers, both college and non-college are the utilizers, college rejectors appear to resemble the low motivated, apathetic, non-participating segment of the public, described in one public opinion study as "chronic know-nothings."[15] The non-college strivers, on the other hand, suggest a group which is somewhat more motivated and more interested in school matters than the average non-college mother, and apparently more likely to participate in other areas of community activity than are most non-college types.

One might argue that the college mother who rejects the opportunities for parental observability is doing so for understandable reasons. Perhaps her child is doing above average work and she feels it unnecessary to attend school meetings. Perhaps, too, she is a working mother who cannot afford the time to participate in school activities.

Correspondingly, the non-college striver (with a high contact rate despite limited observability) may have a child whose poor academic standing demands her attendance at school gatherings. We present data to test this explanation in Table VI.8.

TABLE VI.8

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHOSE CHILDREN ARE DOING "ABOVE AVERAGE" WORK IN SCHOOL BY TYPE OF OBSERVABILITY-CONTACT AND EDUCATION

Type of Mother	Education		All Mothers
	College	Non-College	
Utilizer	47% (245)	31% (138)	42% (383)
Rejector	31 (48)	15 (74)	21 (122)
Striver	54 (91)	27 (214)	35 (305)
Non-Striver	47 (114)	20 (454)	26 (568)
Totals	47% (498)	23% (880)	32% (1378)

Table VI.8 clearly shows that we cannot explain the college rejector's low contact rate on the grounds that her child is doing so well that she has little reason to attend school meetings. In fact the percentage of mothers reporting that the child is doing "above average" work in school is lowest for the rejectors. The very mothers who should, in the eyes of educational personnel, be expending every effort to visit the school, are actually rejecting opportunities for such contact despite the Open Door Policy which the school is maintaining.

On the other hand, the non-college strivers' high attendance rates cannot be explained by the poor academic achievement of their children. The children of the non-college strivers are apparently doing about as well as those of the utilizers, and somewhat better than those of the rejectors and non-strivers.[16]

Perhaps college rejectors find it difficult to get to the school because they hold jobs. Table VI.9 shows that we cannot explain the college mother's rejection of observability arrangements on these grounds, for college rejectors hold jobs at the same rate as other college types, in fact at a lower rate than non-strivers.

Nor are the non-college strivers "ladies of leisure" which might have accounted for their maintaining a high rate of contact with the school despite limited observability arrangements; almost one of every three non-college strivers is a working mother. This rate is about the same as rates for other non-college types.

TABLE VI.9

PERCENTAGE OF WORKING MOTHERS BY TYPE OF OBSERVABILITY-CONTACT AND EDUCATION

Type of Mother	Education		All Mothers
	College	Non-College	
Utilizer	24% (246)	27% (137)	25% (383)
Rejector	24 (46)	38 (77)	32 (123)
Striver	24 (91)	30 (215)	28 (306)
Non-Striver	31 (117)	36 (448)	35 (565)
Totals	26% (500)	34% (877)	31% (1377)

It is interesting that among both college and non-college mothers, the rejectors respond more than any other group that they "find it difficult to visit the school." Table VI.10 shows that almost one-half of the non-college, and one-third of the college rejectors claim they have such difficulty.

TABLE VI.10

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO REPORT DIFFICULTY IN VISITING THE SCHOOL BY TYPE OF OBSERVABILITY-CONTACT AND EDUCATION

Type of Mother	Education		All Mothers
	College	Non-College	
Utilizer	11% (244)	19% (136)	14% (380)
Rejector	33 (48)	44 (77)	40 (125)
Striver	8 (91)	18 (211)	15 (302)
Non-Striver	21 (115)	42 (452)	38 (567)
Totals	15% (498)	33% (876)	26% (1374)

The difficulty in visiting the school reported by the non-college rejector may be the result of the slightly higher employment rate of this group.[17] The college rejector, however, may be rationalizing her non-participation when she reports that she finds it difficult to visit the school.

All the evidence points to the fact that college rejectors constitute a group which is a prototype of the uninterested, apathetic chronic know-nothing of the public opinion literature. This may explain why the Open Door Policy has no spillover effect on the college rejector's knowledge of school personnel, and why her knowledge of school practices is lower than that of all college mothers including the non-strivers (see Table VI.2). These mothers have relatively little interest in school matters, relatively low educational expectations for their children, participate little in general community affairs and seem to feel a psychological difficulty when it comes to visiting the school.

It is hardly surprising to find, therefore, that the rate of chronic know-nothingism among college mothers is highest for the rejectors. These mothers, who seem to resemble most closely the apathetic, disinterested, and ignorant segment of the public depicted by Hyman and Sheatsley,[18] are in fact chronic know-nothings with regard to school affairs.

TABLE VI.11

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING LOW ON THE COMBINED INDICES OF KNOWLEDGE BY TYPE OF OBSERVABILITY-CONTACT AND EDUCATION

Type of Mother	Education	
	College	Non-College
Utilizer	17% (246)	34% (137)
Rejector	46 (48)	49 (79)
Striver	25 (91)	47 (215)
Non-Striver	37 (116)	57 (453)
All Mothers	26% (501)	50% (884)

As a matter of fact, it can be seen in Table VI.11 that college rejectors have approximately the same rate of chronic know-nothingism as do their non-college counterparts. For this uninterested, apathetic segment of the schools' parent-clients the advantage of a college background, which has traditionally discriminated the more from the less knowledgeable, is not associated with a correspondingly high rate of knowledge about school matters. Thus the same characteristics which may explain why some college mothers reject the Open Door Policy of the school, may also explain their relatively low rate of knowledge about school matters.

We expected that those attributes which motivate the non-college strivers toward high participation despite limited observability arrangements, would also be associated with a high level of knowledge. As Table VI.11 indicates, however, the handicap of low observability for the non-college parent is sufficient to depress her rate of total knowledge, even though she utilizes to the fullest whatever observability arrangements the schools provide. When non-college parents, however, are provided with an Open Door Policy and respond with high participation rates, their knowledge rate is slightly higher than that of the college rejectors and non-strivers.

Summary and Conclusions

This and the previous chapter have analyzed the joint effects of parental contact and school-structured observability arrangements on mothers' knowledge about school matters. We saw, first, that contact itself is highly related to mothers' knowledge regarding school personnel and school practices. We saw too, however, that the contextual property of observability has a spillover effect on parental knowledge over and above the effect of contact.

The construction of an observability-contact typology enabled us to determine the kinds of factors which differentiate mothers who have high or low rates of contact in each observability setting. We found that the lowest rates of knowledge among the better educated segment of the population obtained for the small group of college mothers who rejected the school's Open Door Policy. We also found that when non-college parents are provided with extensive observability arrangements there is a reduction of the knowledge gap between them and their better educated counterparts, but that when observability is low, the usual class differences in knowledge are accentuated.

Until now, we have analyzed parental knowledge rates in relation to formal observability arrangements and the differential utilization of these arrangements. That a considerable number of mothers are knowledgeable regarding school personnel and practices in the absence of these arrangements suggests that there are other sources or channels through which information about the school may be obtained.

The next chapter analyzes some of the informal non-school-structured channels which maintain parental observability. After seeing the extent to which these channels are utilized, both in the presence and absence of extensive formal observability arrangements, we shall try to assess their relationship to the level of parental knowledge.

The question we hope to answer at the conclusion of this analysis is a two-fold one:

> What is the level of knowledge for various segments of the parent population when mothers are left to their own

devices to obtain information about school matters?

and

To what extent is this level of parental knowledge increased for various segments of the parent population when schools provide formal arrangements for increased parental observability?

CHAPTER VI

FOOTNOTES

[1] Cf. Merton's typology of modes of adaptation to cultural values in his essay, "Social Structure and Anomie." (Merton, _Social Theory and Social Structure_, chap. IV.)

[2] J. Kahl, "Common Man Boys," _Education, Economy, and Society: A Reader in the Sociology of Education_, A. H. Halsey, J. Floud, and C. A. Anderson, eds. (New York: The Free Press, 1961), pp. 348-66.

[3] We will find, in Chapter VII, that when school-structured opportunities are limited, some parents become "innovators" and utilize informal channels to obtain information about the school.

[4] Martin, _op. cit._, p. 449. (Emphases mine.)

[5] See, for example, S. Fava, "Contrasts in Neighboring: New York City and Suburban County," and H. I. Wilensky, "A Second Look at the Traditional View of Urbanism," in R. L. Warren (ed.), _Perspectives on the American Community: A Book of Readings_ (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1966), pp. 161-166 and pp. 135-147.

[6] Wilensky, _op. cit._, p. 136.

[7] An interpretation of these data has already been given (see Chapter V).

[8] Lazarsfeld _et al._, _op. cit._, chap. 5.

[9] Lipset _et al._, _op. cit._, p. 1129.

[10] Lazarsfeld _et al._, _op. cit._, p. 42.

[11] Lipset _et al._, _op. cit._, p. 1129.

[12] Erskine, "The Polls: Exposure to Domestic Information," pp. 491-500.

[13] See, for example, C. Wright and H. H. Hyman, "Voluntary Association Memberships of American Adults," ed. E. Larrabee and R. Meyersohn, Mass Leisure (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1958), p. 325.

[14] Deutsch and Collins, op. cit., pp. 33-6.

[15] Hyman and Sheatsley, op. cit.

[16] We note that although the children of college parents are doing better at school than are children of non-college parents, the differential between the two groups is larger in low than in high observability settings. As Table VI.7 indicates, 16% more college than non-college utilizers and rejectors, but 27% more college than non-college strivers and non-strivers report that their children are doing "above average" work. Thus a correlate of the provision of extensive observability arrangements is not only the reduction of the knowledge gap between higher and lower SES parents, but also the reduction of the academic achievement gap between higher and lower SES children.

[17] The lower socio-economic status of the non-college parent may mean she has less money to pay a baby-sitter and less availability of a car -- both of which factors may also limit her attendance at school meetings.

[18] Hyman and Sheatsley, op. cit.

CHAPTER VII

ALTERNATIVE AND SUPPLEMENTARY SOURCES OF PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE

The three preceding chapters have analyzed the relationship of observability and contact to parental knowledge about school matters. It would be unrealistic to assume, however, that mothers' knowledge about the school is obtained solely through the formal arrangements provided by the school which we have called "observability."

It is true that parental knowledge is higher when such arrangements exist and are utilized by mothers. Still, in the small towns and rural community we found that the absence of formally-structured observability arrangements was not accompanied by a low level of parental knowledge.

Similarly, we noted that for mothers with a college background the limitation of formal observability was not associated with parental ignorance regarding school matters, but merely with a slightly lower level of knowledge than that of college mothers in high observability settings.

Clearly, mothers are not completely dependent upon these formal arrangements. Left to their own devices to obtain information there are a number of alternative sources through which knowledge about the school is obtained.

It was noted that when schools were maintaining an Open Door Policy, most mothers, regardless of socio-economic background, were taking advantage of this policy and there was a substantial reduction of the knowledge gap between the more and the less educated mothers. On the other hand, when observability arrangements were limited, and the formal contact rates of both groups dropped sharply, this knowledge gap was accentuated: the college mother retained a relatively high level of knowledge but there was a considerable drop in the level of knowledge of the less educated mother.

The provision by the school of extensive observability arrangements appears to be a prerequisite for knowledge of non-college or working-class mothers, but not of college or middle-class ones. The latter may have access to a variety of alternative channels through which information about the school is obtained. Unprovided with the formally school-structured arrangements, the college educated mothers can turn for information to other knowledgeable people, such as the principal, teachers, other school personnel, school board officials, or community influentials. All of these are more likely to be accessible to middle-class or better educated mothers than to working-class ones.

The present chapter focusses on the extent to which other (than formal observability) channels are utilized by mothers. We shall try to determine whether these other channels serve primarily as alternative sources of knowledge, that is, are they utilized more frequently in the absence of formal observability arrangements, or as supplementary sources of knowledge, utilized more extensively by the same mothers who are already obtaining information through the formal school-structured channels? Which of these other channels are functional equivalents (as far as the level of parental knowledge is concerned) to observability and formal school contact? To what extent is an increase in the level of parental knowledge associated with utilization of the formal observability arrangements in addition to the other channels?

Informal Observability: "Other" Sources of Parental Knowledge

As everyone knows, parents may be obtaining information about the school from a variety of sources other than the PTA, the Back-to-School Night, or the Scheduled Conference for All Parents. Some knowledge may be the product of other kinds of direct contact with the school. Accordingly, mothers were asked whether they had had any casual contact with the teacher, had held a private (non-school-scheduled) conference with the teacher, or whether they had spoken with other personnel at the school, such as the principal, librarian, music teacher, etc.

Public opinion studies have found that many people obtain their information about current issues or political affairs indirectly, through informal communication networks rather than as a result of direct exposure to the mass media.[1] In the same way, mothers may become knowledgeable about school matters by talking with their children, with other parents, or with school personnel who may be included in their circle of personal friends. Each respondent was questioned about the frequency with which she discussed school matters with her child or with other parents, as well as the frequency with which others asked her opinion about school matters. Mothers were also asked whether any of their personal friends were teachers.

These direct and indirect sources of knowledge obviously do not exhaust the possible channels through which information about school matters may be obtained. They represent those channels about which respondents were questioned.

TABLE VII.1

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS UTILIZING SELECTED CHANNELS FOR OBTAINING INFORMATION ABOUT SCHOOL MATTERS BY EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Channels	All Mothers	College Mothers	Non-College Mothers
Direct			
Casual contact with teacher	28%	37%	23%
Private conference	21	24	20
High on I C P[a]	38	45	34
Indirect			
Talks daily to child about school	92%	95%	91%
Talks to other parents about school	70	77	67
Serves as opinion leader[b]	67	74	63
Has teacher friends	51	70	40
Number of mothers	(1385)	(501)	(884)

[a] Index of Contact with School Personnel[2]

[b] Reports that people "often" or "sometimes" ask her opinion about school matters.

Table VII.1 shows that 28% of the mothers report at least one casual encounter with the child's teacher;[3] 21% have had a private (non-school-scheduled) conference with the child's teacher; and 38% report contact with two or more of the following: the principal, assistant principal, school psychologist, gym teacher or coach, librarian, nurse, or music teacher. College mothers have not only had more contact with school personnel than have non-college mothers; they have also had more casual contact with the child's teacher. While 14% more college than non-college mothers report some casual contact with the child's teacher, however, only 4% more college than non-college mothers report having had a private conference with this teacher. We expected the motivated, child-centered college mother, with car and baby-sitter more readily available, to participate more frequently in such conferences than the non-college mother, but apparently the educational background of the mother is not a predictor of the rate of private parent-teacher conferences.[4]

Apart from this item, however, the college-educated mother has more direct contact with her child's teacher or with other school personnel than does the non-college one. She also seems to have more access to indirect sources of parental knowledge (Table VII.1).

One indirect source, presumably equally available to all parents, is the child himself. But the "what did you do in school today?" may or may not yield information. Some children respond "Nothing!" Others give a detailed account of their achievements and frustrations. Some mothers follow up the original question with requests for specific details, while others may not even ask the first question. We will see later that the extent of information yielded by these conversations differs for mothers depending on their educational background.

Mothers may also be obtaining information about the school by talking with other parents, either at school or in the neighborhood. Just as talking with one's child may yield different degrees of knowledge, talking with other parents about school matters also may or may not yield much information. Table VII.1 shows that more college mothers report frequent conversations with other parents about school matters than non-college mothers. Later we will see that these conversations are associated with higher levels of knowledge about school personnel for the non-college mothers, but with more knowledge of the more abstract dimension of school practices for the college mothers.

Two-thirds of the mothers are self-designated "opinion leaders," that is, in response to the question, "how often do other parents ask your opinion regarding school matters?" they responded "often" or "sometimes." Katz and Lazarsfeld found that self-designated opinion leaders are drawn from the various class levels of the social structure.[5] We find, however, that 74% of college mothers, but 63% of non-college mothers, are self-designated opinion leaders about school matters.

Perhaps this is partly because more college mothers have personal friends who are teachers than do non-college mothers (70% compared to 40%). Mothers who claim teachers among their personal friends may be more "in the know" themselves about school matters and therefore more likely to serve as opinion leaders for other mothers in the community.[6]

In sum, whether it is a matter of direct contact with the teacher or other school personnel, or of indirect opportunities to obtain information about the school through others in the community, the better educated mothers have readier access to all these channels. Before concluding, however, that this compounds the advantage already held by college mothers, in that they are generally located in high observability settings, let us see whether these other channels serve as equivalents of observability and formal school contact in so far as knowledge of school matters is concerned. The extent to which each type of direct or indirect contact is associated with a high rank on the two indices of knowledge, that is, the Index of Knowledge of School Personnel and the Index of Knowledge of School Practices, is shown in Table VII.2.

TABLE VII.2

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS RANKING HIGH ON THE INDICES OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES BY WHETHER THEY HAVE UTILIZED SELECTED CHANNELS OTHER THAN SCHOOL-STRUCTURED OBSERVABILITY ARRANGEMENTS

Was Channel Below Utilized?	Percentage Ranking High On:				Number of Mothers	
	Index of Personnel		Index of Practices			
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Direct						
Casual contact with teacher	53%	26%	56%	38%	(382)	(974)
Private conference	45	31	50	41	(295)	(1079)
High on I C P	47	26	52	38	(529)	(862)
Indirect						
Talks daily to child about school	36%	10%	44%	30%	(1283)	(104)
Talks to other parents about school	39	21	49	30	(956)	(415)
Serves as opinion leader	39	24	50	29	(920)	(449)
Has teacher friends	42	26	69	17	(697)	(673)
Ranks high on Index of Formal School Contact	47%	21%	55%	39%	(690)	(702)
All mothers	34%		47%		(1392)	

In every instance, mothers who utilize these direct or indirect means of obtaining information about the school rank higher on each of the two indices than do mothers who fail to use these channels. Some channels, however, seem to make more of a difference in the level of parental knowledge than others. For example, 9% more mothers rank high on the Index of Practices if they have held a private conference with the child's teacher than if they have not. Having a friend who is a teacher is apparently an asset in becoming informed about school practices -- seven of every ten mothers rank high on this dimension of knowledge when they report having teachers as friends. This is four times as many as those who have no teachers as friends.

Why should having a teacher friend make such a difference in mothers' knowledge of school practices? Litwak and Meyer note that certain communications from the school involve complex kinds of messages, such as communicating a fundamental change in educational policy. They suggest that

> . . . the more complex the information, the more necessary a close contact between a professional expert and the group to be influenced.[7]

The teacher who is also a personal friend satisfies the two criteria of "close contact" and "professional expert," and may, in the course of his diffuse relationship with the mother, transmit information about school practices to his friend.

For more simple information, on the other hand, this principle of "focused expertise" is less relevant. Litwak and Meyer suggest that effective conveyers of such matters are "common messengers," such as the child.[8] As Table VII.2 indicates, talking daily with the child about school matters makes more of a difference in mothers' knowledge of school personnel than school practices. Similarly, casual contact with the child's teacher is associated with a higher level of knowledge about school personnel. It is not surprising that fragmentary contact with the child's teacher is unrelated to knowledge about the more complex, abstract school practices.

Direct and Indirect Channels as Functional Equivalents of Formal School Contact

In Chapter V, we found that 34% of all mothers rank high on the Index of Personnel and 47% rank high on the Index of Practices. Mothers' utilization of the formal observability arrangements provided by the school is associated with an increase from the mean of 34% to 47% for knowledge of personnel, and from the mean of 47% to 55% for knowledge of school practices (see Table VII.2).

A number of mothers, however, find themselves in settings where limited observability makes it difficult to maintain the high rate of formal school contact which is so highly related to a high level of parental knowledge. It is important, therefore, to ascertain whether any of these other channels which mothers are utilizing are related to about the same degree as formal school contact to the level of parental knowledge.

Table VII.2 shows that all three types of direct school contact (casual contact with the teacher, private conferences, and contact with other school personnel) are equivalents of formal school contact for knowledge of school personnel. This conclusion is based on the fact that the mean knowledge rate of 34% is raised by approximately the same amount for mothers with these types of direct school contact as it is for mothers who utilize the formal observability arrangements at a high rate. In fact, casual contact with the teacher is accompanied by a slightly greater increase in mothers' scores on the Index of Personnel than is high formal school contact (from 34% to 53% in the former case; from 34% to 47% in the latter). None of the indirect channels are equivalents of formal school contact for knowledge of school personnel.

For knowledge of school practices, using the same method to determine equivalency, we find that casual contact with the teacher and contact with school personnel are both equivalents of formal school contact. Having personal friends who are teachers is associated with a strikingly high rise from the mean of 47% to 69%. None of the other indirect channels are equivalents of formal school contact for knowledge of school practices.

The two items which are associated with the largest mean increase in mothers' knowledge scores (casual contact with the teacher and having personal friends who are teachers) are those very items for which the largest utilization differences between college and non-college mothers obtain (see Table VII.1). We can only conclude from this fact that, while equivalents of formal school contact do exist, these too are more readily available to the better-educated mothers and more frequently utilized by them, thus increasing the knowledge gap between the more and the less educated parent.

Alternative or Supplementary Sources of Knowledge

We know that almost three-fifths of the mothers in our sample send their children to schools which provide only limited formal opportunities for them to obtain information about the school. And we have just seen that other channels through which knowledge may be obtained exist and contribute to the level of information. We now want to determine whether these equivalent channels serve as alternative or supplementary sources of parental knowledge. If they are alternatives, then it may be concluded that the limitation of formal observability is not a serious matter since the lack of formal school-structured opportunities is compensated for by use of these functional equivalents. If, on the other hand, it is found that the utilization of these equivalent sources of parental knowledge is highest among those already reaping the benefits of high observability, we must conclude that, under conditions of limited observability, the knowledge gap between the more and less favored segments of the parent population is being widened rather than reduced.

Guetzkow notes that communications are central phenomena in organizations, for they

> . . . aid in the development and maintenance of organizational purposes, as its members motivate and inspire each other toward goal accomplishments. . . . In addition to serving as the matrix which links members together in organizations . . . the communication system serves as the vehicle by which organizations are embedded in their environments. The inputs and outputs of organizations are mediated through communications.[9]

The recognition that ". . . the structure, extensiveness, and scope of the organization are almost entirely determined by communication techniques . . ."[10] has led to the suggestion that when formal communication channels prove ineffective, informal networks become alternative sources of information. Thus Cartwright says:

> . . . the absence or malfunctioning of an articulation unit will have widespread repercussions for the organization . . . [this] may account for the frequently reported existence of 'informal' or 'unapproved' communication channels in such organizations.[11]

Blau's study of the departmental structure of a federal enforcement agency[12] notes that the official rules prescribed that communication regarding problem cases be channeled directly from agent to supervisor. The reluctance of agents to reveal their inability to solve a problem to their supervisor for fear that their ratings would be adversely affected gave rise to the unofficial and disapproved practice of consulting with colleagues regarding difficult cases.[13] Apparently, the "need to know" in order to function effectively, requires turning to informal, alternative channels when formal ones are unavailable or cumbersome.

There is evidence, however, from studies of public opinion and personal influence that informal communication channels may serve as supplementary, rather than alternative sources of knowledge. Thus those who obtain information about public affairs and current issues directly from the mass media (the formal channels) are likely to be the same individuals who are located at the juncture of informal networks of communication, receiving and disseminating information in a given area of knowledge.[14]

Are these other channels which mothers utilize serving as alternative or supplementary sources of parental knowledge about the school? If they are primarily alternative sources of knowledge then we may expect to find them being utilized among mothers in low observability settings or among mothers with low rates of formal contact with the school. If they are serving as supplementary sources of knowledge, we expect them to be utilized more by the same mothers who are already utilizing the formal opportunities provided by schools.

One indication that these other sources of parental knowledge are supplementary rather than alternative is provided by the fact that they seem to be utilized at a higher rate by college than non-college mothers. We know that the former are usually located in high observability settings and have higher rates of formal contact with the school than their non-college counterparts. Table VII.3 presents utilization rates of each informal channel for mothers located in high and low observability settings.

TABLE VII.3

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS UTILIZING EACH DIRECT AND INDIRECT CHANNEL BY OBSERVABILITY

Channels	Observability	
	High	Low
Direct		
Casual contact with teacher	37%	23%
Private conference	27	19
High on I C P	38	38
Indirect		
Talks daily to child about school	96%	90%
Talks to other parents about school	75	67
Serves as opinion leader	70	66
Has teacher friends	57	47
Number of mothers	(511)	(881)

Table VII.3 shows that, except for contact with other school personnel (ICP), each of these channels is utilized somewhat more frequently in a high than in a low observability setting. The same mothers who are provided with extensive formal opportunities to obtain knowledge make greater use of other channels for acquiring information about the school.

The reason for this finding may be two-fold. We suggested in Chapter III that the Open Door Policy of a school may generate not only increased formal contact but also may generate informal friendship networks of mothers and informal channels of communication. Casual contact with the teacher, contact with other school personnel, talking to parents and being asked one's opinion about school matters may all be by-products of attendance at a PTA meeting or a Back-to-School Night. Thus the formal school-structured arrangements may not only be sources of knowledge in and of themselves, but may also increase the opportunities for utilization of other channels through which information about the school may flow.

If this is so, then those mothers whose children attend schools with only limited formal observability arrangements are doubly deprived. They not only have fewer opportunities to obtain information through formal channels, but they are also handicapped in their opportunity to utilize the informal by-products of formal school contact.

Perhaps the educational background of the parent accounts for the relationship between observability and utilization of other sources of knowledge. College mothers tend to be overrepresented in high observability settings and they also have higher utilization rates for each type of informal contact. Table VII.4 presents the utilization rates of college and non-college mothers in both high and low observability settings, and shows that the educational background of the mothers does not account for the relationship between observability and utilization of other channels.

TABLE VII.4

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS UTILIZING EACH DIRECT AND INDIRECT CHANNEL BY EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND AND OBSERVABILITY

Channels	Observability High		Observability Low	
	College	Non-College	College	Non-College
Direct				
Casual contact with teacher	39%	35%	35%	19%
Private conference	28	25	19	18
I C P	41	35	52	34
Indirect				
Talks daily to child about school	97%	95%	92%	90%
Talks to other parents about school	78	70	75	64
Serves as opinion leader	75	62	73	63
Has teacher friends	53	43	74	39
Number of mothers	(294)	(216)	(207)	(668)

In low observability settings, college mothers utilize other channels at about the same or at an increased rate. Significantly, the two channels which college mothers utilize at an increased rate in low observability settings are those associated with an even higher level of knowledge than formal school contacts (contact with school personnel and having teachers as friends). The utilization rates of non-college mothers in low observability settings, on the contrary, show a sharp reduction relative to the college mothers, especially for casual contact, contact with school personnel, and teacher friends -- again these items are most associated with higher levels of knowledge.

Table VII.4 also shows that the gap between the utilization rates of the college and the non-college mothers is more pronounced in the low observability settings, especially for those channels which are equivalents for parental knowledge.

These two conclusions may be more readily seen in Table VII.4(A) which summarizes the data of Table VII.4 in the form of percentage differences.

TABLE VII.4(A)

PERCENTAGE DIFFERENCES OF TABLE VII.4

Channels	(1) Percentage difference in utilization rates associated with differences in observability for		(2) Percentage difference in utilization rates between college and non-college mothers when observability is	
	College Mothers	Non-College Mothers	High	Low
Direct				
Casual contact with teacher	-4%	-16%	-4%	-16%
Private conference	-9	-7	-3	-1
High on I C P	+11	-1	-6	-18
Indirect				
Talks daily to child about school	-5%	-5%	-2%	-2%
Talks to other parents about school	-3	-6	-8	-11
Serves as opinion leader	-2	+1	-13	-10
Has teacher friends	+21	-4	-10	-25

In the left hand section of Table VII.4(A) (1), we see the relationship between a change from high to low observability and utilization of direct and indirect channels for college and non-college mothers. For example (top row), the college mother's casual contact is 4% lower in the low observability setting than in the high one; the non-college mother's, 16% lower. Similarly, contact with other school personnel (third row) is 11% higher for the college mother when observability is limited, but remains constant for her less educated counterpart.

In the right-hand section of Table VII.4(A) (2), we see the relationship between the observability setting and the gap in the utilization rates of these channels between college and non-college mothers. When observability is high, for example (top row), college and non-college mothers have about the same rate of casual contact with the teacher (the rate for college mothers is 4% higher than that for non-college parents). When observability is limited, however, the difference between the two groups is 16%. Similarly, the gap between college and non-college mothers' rate of contact with school personnel is 6% in the high observability setting, but 18% in the low one.

The differences presented in Table VII.4(A) are slight, but they suggest an important specification to the conclusion that these informal channels serve as supplementary sources of parental knowledge about the school. Two of these channels (contact with school personnel and access to teacher friends) appear to serve as alternative sources of knowledge for college mothers, for they are utilized more frequently when observability is low than when it is high.[15] In Chapter III, we found that 84% of college mothers ranked high on the Index of Formal School Contact when observability was high, but only 44% when observability was low (see Table III.14). Still, the knowledge level of the better educated mother was much higher than that of her non-college counterpart (see Chapter V). This may be precisely because the better educated parent is aware of alternative sources of knowledge and is using them to obtain information about the school.

The non-college mother, on the other hand, uses these other channels at a relatively high rate in the Open Door schools, but not as alternative channels for knowledge when formal observability is limited.

We repeat, therefore, that formal observability arrangements which schools provide not only allow for more knowledge through increased formal school contacts, but also provide opportunities for readier access to other sources of knowledge. Accordingly, when an Open Door Policy prevails, both college and non-college mothers not only have higher rates of formal school contact, but also of informal contact. This is associated with a higher level of knowledge about school matters for both groups.

When observability is low, however, and formal contact with the school is low for both college and non-college mothers, the former (but not the latter) have access to alternative sources; we find then an increased knowledge gap between college and non-college mothers in low observability settings.

There is one channel which the non-college mother utilizes more frequently when observability is low than when it is high, namely, contact with the school nurse. We find that 34% of the non-college mothers report contact with the nurse in high observability schools, compared to 50% in the low observability schools. We find, however, that scores on the Indices of Personnel and Practices are the same for mothers whether or not they have contact with the school nurse. Thus, even when the non-college mother does utilize an alternative channel when observability is low, the channel she finds most accessible is unrelated to knowledge about the school, while the channels utilized by the college mother as alternative sources of knowledge are those which are associated with higher levels of information about school matters.

We have seen that certain channels are serving as equivalents of observability in producing knowledge about the school, but that these equivalent channels are utilized more frequently by the same individuals who already have the advantage of location in a high observability setting -- the college mothers. Educational background, however, is not the only factor found to be highly related to observability. In Chapter II we saw that observability arrangements are differentially distributed to the advantage of the elementary school mother, the suburban mother, and the mother in the middle-class community.

Thus in addition the non-college mother there are other "observability starved" groups of mothers: the high school mothers, the non-suburban mother, and the mother in a working-class neighborhood. In Chapter IV we found that these mothers have lower levels of knowledge about school matters than their counterparts in high observability settings. The single exception was the small town mother whose knowledge is greater than that of her suburban counterpart, except when the latter has the advantage of high observability. We suggested that observability may not be a prerequisite for knowledge of school matters in the small town, since such knowledge is more readily attainable through informal channels and communication networks. Furthermore, when we found that the knowledge of mothers in middle-class areas is only slightly less when observability is limited, we suggested that alternative sources of knowledge may be more available to these mothers than to mothers in working-class areas.

The next sections examine the utilization rates of the three equivalents of observability (casual contact with the teacher, contact with other school personnel, and having a teacher as a friend) in different school and community settings.

Utilization of Equivalent Channels and School Level

Just as elementary school parents utilize the formal observability arrangements at a higher rate than high school mothers (see Chapter III) they also utilize other direct sources of knowledge at a higher rate (Table VII.5).

When formal observability is limited, however, the casual contacts of elementary school mothers are 10% lower, while they remain about the same for high school mothers. Similarly, elementary school mothers' ratings on the ICP are the same in high and low observability settings, but when observability is low (as it is for most high school mothers), 13% more have a high rate of contact with school personnel.

TABLE VII.5

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS UTILIZING EQUIVALENT CHANNELS BY SCHOOL LEVEL AND OBSERVABILITY

Channel	Elementary School Mothers			High School Mothers		
	Observability		All Elementary School Mothers	Observability		All High School Mothers
	High	Low		High	Low	
Have had casual contact with teacher	41%	31%	37%	8%	10%	10%
Rank high on I C P	42	40	40	23	36	33
Have teacher friend	57	42	48	59	56	57
Number of mothers	(410)	(522)	(932)	(88)	(336)	(424)

The higher rate of contact with school personnel, as well as the fact that high school mothers have more teachers as friends than do elementary school mothers may explain why, despite their low rate of formal contact with the school, high school mothers rank higher on the Index of Knowledge of School Practices than do elementary school mothers, especially in low observability settings (see Chapter IV).

In sum, formal observability appears to be a prerequisite of knowledge for the elementary school mother, with the functionally equivalent items serving as supplementary sources of knowledge. For high school mothers, however, these items appear to serve as alternative sources of knowledge, utilized more frequently when formal observability is limited.

Utilization of Equivalent Channels and Community Type

In Chapter IV we found that observability is a prerequisite of knowledge for city and suburban mothers, but not for small town or rural ones. At that time we suggested that informal neighborhood networks and the central role that schools generally play in the small town may make it relatively easier for mothers in these communities to obtain information about school matters without the aid of formal observability.

In Table VII.6 we see that for two of the three equivalent channels, the small town mother has an advantage over city, suburban, and rural mothers when observability is low, but not when mothers in the city and suburbs are provided with high observability. Casual contact rates are about the same for mothers in the four types of communities when observability is high. When observability is low, however, the rates of contact with school personnel are about twice as high, and the percentage having teachers as friends about 1½ times as high for mothers in the small town as for those in the city, suburbs, or rural community.

In the larger city and suburb, where formal observability was found to be a prerequisite for knowledge of school matters, the equivalent channels seem to serve as supplementary sources of knowledge, for all three channels are utilized at a higher rate by city and suburban mothers under conditions of high observability than of low observability. When the city and suburban schools provide only limited observability arrangements, the mothers do not use these equivalent channels as alternative means of obtaining information.

TABLE VII.6

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS UTILIZING EQUIVALENT CHANNELS BY COMMUNITY TYPE AND OBSERVABILITY

Channel	City			Suburb			Town			Rural		
	Observability			Observability			Observability			Observability		
	High	Low	All Mothers	High	Low	All Mothers	High	Low	All Mothers	High	Low	All Mothers
Have had casual contact with teacher	42%	20%	24%	35%	23%	31%	43%	24%	30%	*	30%	30%
Rank high on I C P	47	33	36	37	29	34	34	61	53	*	30	30
Have teacher friends	65	38	43	58	47	54	43	68	61	*	44	44
Number of mothers	(93)	(380)	(472)	(336)	(176)	(512)	(83)	(197)	(280)	(0)	(127)	(127)

*There are no mothers in a high observability setting in the rural community.

The high rates of knowledge of small town mothers under conditions of low observability (Chapter V, Table V.11) together with their higher contact with school personnel and increased access to teacher friends, suggest that these two items are serving as alternative sources of information about school matters in the absence of formal observability.

Although these sources are not utilized by rural mothers (with the exception of casual contact with the teacher) these mothers have more knowledge about school personnel and almost as much knowledge about school practices as mothers in the small town (see Chapter IV). The low rates of contact, both formal and informal, may reflect the greater physical distances from the school in the rural community, especially at the high school level. But despite the frequency of either formal or informal contact, and despite the limited observability arrangements of the rural elementary and high school, mothers in this community rank high on both indices of knowledge. This suggests that other factors must be considered in any analysis of community type differences in parental knowledge about school matters. We suggest two:

1) Availability of Additional Sources

Rural parents may be using sources other than those about which information was obtained in the study. In the rural setting, which permits more diffuse, gemeinshaft-type relationships, mothers may number school board members or others who are connected with school affairs among their friends. Similarly, their daily activities may place them in regular contact with community influentials in the areas of political, business, or religious affairs, who may themselves be well-informed about school problems and school characteristics.

2) The School as an "Open System" in the Small Community

Carter and Sutthoff suggest that in the small community, school-community relationships constitute an "open system," not necessitating a multitude of mediating agencies such as PTA's or the mass media.[16] They found that the factors most often named by their sample of community influentials as contributing to successful school-community relations in large districts were the above mediating agencies. In small communities, on the other hand, direct communication in the form of personal contact between school people and the public were more important.[17] Thus in the rural community the school does not constitute a system which is informally closed off from the community, but rather is part of the network of informal diffuse relationships typical of the small community. This may explain why, despite limited utilization of our particular indicators of formal and informal contact, rural parents maintain a high level of knowledge about school matters.

Utilization of Equivalent Channels and Community Socio-Economic Level

We found previously that mothers in middle class areas have more formal school contact than mothers in working-class neighborhoods, but that both the contact and the knowledge gap between the two groups is considerably less under conditions of high observability. The limitation of observability is accompanied by a sharp reduction of formal contact in both middle-class and working-class areas, but by a sharp reduction only in the knowledge level of the working-class mother. The level of knowledge of mothers in middle-class areas remains high in limited observability settings. This suggests that mothers in these communities have readier access to the sources which serve as functional equivalents of observability.

Table VII.7 shows that all three equivalent channels are used more by middle-class than by working-class mothers. While casual contact with the teacher and contact with other school personnel are slightly higher for working-class mothers than for the middle-class ones when an Open Door Policy prevails at the school, the latter have an advantage over the former when observability is limited. This is particularly true of contact with school personnel. The rate of middle-class mothers is almost twice as high on this item when observability is low, while working-class mothers have less contact with school personnel under conditions of low observability than they do in high observability settings.

Similarly, while casual contact with the teacher is less for both groups in low observability settings than in high ones, the decrease is much greater for the working-class than for the middle-class mother. Furthermore, the middle-class mother seems to have more teachers as friends, but the working-class mother fewer, in a low than in a high observability setting. In sum, the relationships observed when mothers are characterized by the global property of their community's socio-economic level are very similar to those noted when the individual characteristic of educational background is used. Both point to the conclusion that when barriers to formal participation are raised, the middle-class mother, but not the working-class one, has access to alternative sources of knowledge about school matters.

TABLE VII.7

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS UTILIZING EQUIVALENT CHANNELS BY COMMUNITY SES AND OBSERVABILITY

Channel	Middle-Class Communities			Working-Class Communities		
	Observability			Observability		
	High	Low	All Mothers	High	Low	All Mothers
Have had casual contact with teacher	36%	29%	34%	40%	21%	26%
Rank high on I C P	38	67	47	38	34	35
Have teacher friends	64	75	67	42	38	39
Number of mothers	(351)	(154)	(505)	(160)	(461)	(621)

The overall conclusion seems to be that all the relatively "observability-starved" groups (working-class mothers, high school mothers, non-suburban mothers, or non-college mothers) that is, those who are generally located in low observability settings, have higher rates of formal contact when they have the advantage of an Open Door Policy, and in addition utilize the equivalent sources as supplementary channels for increasing their knowledge about the school. When observability barriers exist, however, it is only the high school mother and the small town mother who have recourse to alternative channels; the others suffer the double deprivation of lack of formal channels and lack of access to alternative channels.

Utilizers, Rejectors, Strivers, and Non-Strivers and Utilization of Equivalent Channels

In Chapter V, we found that while most mothers in high observability settings were maintaining high rates of formal contact with the school, and most in limited observability settings had only a minimum of such contact, there were two "deviant" types of mothers:

1) those who failed to take advantage of the school's Open Door Policy, and
2) those who maintained high rates of formal contact despite limited observability.

Four types of mothers were derived by combining the global property of observability with the individual property of contact: utilizers, rejectors, strivers, and non-strivers (see Chapter VI).

In brief, we found that the knowledge scores of utilizers were highest, followed by strivers, rejectors and finally non-strivers. When the educational background of the mother was introduced as a control, however, college rejectors were found not only to have low knowledge scores (among college mothers the proportion of chronic know-nothings was highest for rejectors) but also little interest in school matters, low educational expectations, and low rates of general participation in community activities. Non-college strivers, on the other hand, usually ranked higher than other non-college mothers on these items.

We suggested that the college rejector and the non-college striver were polar types, one apathetic, uninterested, non-participating, and poorly informed; the other motivated, actively participating and relatively well-informed. Still, we entertained the possibility that

TABLE VII.8

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS UTILIZING EQUIVALENT CHANNELS BY TYPE OF OBSERVABILITY-CONTACT AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Type of Mother	Have had casual contact			Rank high on I C P			Have teachers as friends			Number of Mothers		
	College	Non-College	All Mothers	College	Non-College	All Mothers	College	Non-College	All Mothers	College	Non-College	All Mothers
Utilizer	42%	40%	41%	42%	37%	41%	71%	51%	64%	(246)	(137)	(383)
Rejector	26	25	26	29	30	30	49	30	37	(48)	(79)	(127)
Striver	41	33	36	58	45	50	74	41	51	(91)	(215)	(306)
Non-Striver	30	13	16	47	29	32	74	38	45	(116)	(453)	(569)

rejectors, especially those with a college background, may be rejecting the formal observability channels but utilizing alternative sources.

Table VII.8 presents the rates of casual contact with the teacher, contact with other school personnel, and percentage with teachers as friends for each of the four types of mothers. Clearly, college rejectors rank lower on all three items than college mothers in the other categories. Apparently, the motivation of this group is so low that they not only reject formal opportunities for contact, but make little effort to utilize other channels through which information about school matters may be obtained. The "deviant" character of this group is even reflected in the fact that only half of the college rejectors, but three-fourths of other college mothers report having teachers as friends.

The more highly motivated non-college strivers have contact with school personnel at a slightly higher rate than other non-college types, but report somewhat less casual contact and fewer teachers as friends than non-college utilizers.

It appears that these equivalent channels for obtaining knowledge are being utilized primarily by those mothers who already have high formal contact with the school, namely, the utilizers and strivers. This is especially true for college utilizers and strivers. The college non-strivers seem to be compensating, however, for their double handicap of low observability and low formal contact by turning to other school personnel or teacher friends for information about school matters. The non-college non-strivers, on the other hand, utilize the additional channels to only a minimal extent.

The data suggest that for both college and non-college mothers formal contact with the school encourages utilization of additional channels, while rejection of the formal opportunities for contact is related to non-utilization of other possible sources of information. Either an Open Door Policy, or initiative in the face of low observability, is required if non-college mothers are to take advantage of other sources of knowledge. The college mother, on the other hand, always has alternative sources at her disposal if formal observability is limited.

Equivalent Channels, Observability and Parental Knowledge

One question remains to be answered. When schools provide only limited observability arrangements, we have seen that some mothers are still able to obtain information about school matters through casual contact with the teacher, contact with other school personnel, or teachers who are personal friends.

Let us suppose that all schools provided only limited observability arrangements for parents. How much knowledge of personnel and practices could be expected if mothers used the equivalent channels? To what extent is there a higher level of parental knowledge when the school intervenes by providing observability arrangements? Table VII.9 suggests the answers to these questions. Clearly, utilization of the equivalent channels is not associated with a high level of knowledge in low observability settings. The single exception is that 63% of the mothers who have teachers as friends rank high on the Index of Practices. The mean knowledge scores for all mothers (34% on the Index of Personnel

TABLE VII.9

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS IN HIGH AND LOW OBSERVABILITY SETTINGS RANKING HIGH ON THE INDICES OF PERSONNEL AND PRACTICES WHERE THEY HAVE UTILIZED THE EQUIVALENT CHANNELS

Channel	Index of Personnel			Index of Practices			Number of Mothers	
	Observability			Observability				
	Low	High	Difference	Low	High	Difference	Low	High
Have had casual contact	44%	63%	+19%	47%	65%	+18%	(196)	(186)
Rank high on I C P	40	59	+19	46	62	+16	(335)	(194)
Have teacher as friend	35	53	+18	63	76	+13	(409)	(233)
All Mothers	(34%)			(47%)			(1392)	

and 47% on the Index of Practices) is only slightly higher in low observability settings if the mother has utilized an equivalent channel.

When the school intervenes, however, by providing formal arrangements for parental observability, there is a corresponding increase in the level of knowledge associated with each channel. Knowledge scores are substantially higher than the mean rates of 34% and 47%.

In sum, we see that, while mothers utilize other channels than those formally provided by the school in order to obtain information, these channels are associated with much higher knowledge levels when they are utilized in a high than in a low observability setting. In the Open Door Schools, utilization of these other channels seems to supplement the knowledge which is associated with location in a privileged observability setting; in the limited observability schools, the use of these channels has little bearing on the level of parental knowledge.

Summary and Conclusions

Most mothers seem to be interested in school matters and concerned with obtaining information about them. When the schools provide extensive opportunities for mothers to become knowledgeable, parents overwhelmingly utilize these opportunities. The outstanding exception is a small group of college mothers who are disinterested, apathetic, and unreachable.

While those who utilize the formal opportunities rank high in their knowledge of school matters, these opportunities are differentially distributed to the advantage of the middle-class or better educated mother. Alternative channels exist and these are also associated with the level of parental knowledge. These channels, however, are accompanied by a high level of knowledge only when utilized in a high observability setting. When they are utilized without the benefit of formal observability arrangements, there is little increase in knowledge about the school.

Moreover, while mothers who are left to their own devices to obtain information have recourse to other channels which are associated with knowledge, these channels too are differentially distributed, to the disadvantage of the already "opportunity-starved" working-class or non-college parent. For it was found that an Open Door Policy is accompanied not only by extensive formal school contacts for most mothers, but also provides a context within which casual contacts or contacts with other school personnel flourish. Again, working-class or non-college mothers, the majority of whom are located in low observability settings, are deprived not only of formal, but also of alternative channels through which information may be obtained.

Clearly, unless schools maintain full observability conditions, traditional class differences in knowledge about schools and participation in their activities may be expected to persist.

Educational administrators have given full ideological support to the notion of high observability. Without exception, the prevalent feeling is that higher parental participation in school affairs will lead to increased knowledge and understanding of the school, and as a result, to more wholehearted support of school policy and financial requirements. We have seen that increased participation is indeed associated with higher levels of knowledge. It remains to be seen, however, whether increased knowledge is accompanied by greater satisfaction with the school and readiness to support its policies and programs. Chapters VIII and IX will take up this question.

CHAPTER VII

FOOTNOTES

[1] Lazarsfeld, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, Katz, *op. cit.*, and Katz and Lazarsfeld, *op. cit.*

[2] Since only a small proportion of parents have had any contact at all with school personnel other than the principal or the school nurse, it was decided to combine the various contacts of this type into an Index of Contact with School Personnel. A mother ranks high on this Index if she has had contact with two or more designated personnel. The extent of mothers' contact with these individuals is as follows:

Personnel	All Mothers	College Mothers	Non-College Mothers
Principal	42%	46%	40%
Assistant Principal	20	21	19
Gym Teacher	12	15	10
Music Teacher	14	20	11
Psychologist	10	12	9
Librarian	6	8	5
Nurse	46	45	46
Number of Mothers	(1363)	(512)	(851)

With the single exception of the school nurse, college mothers have had more contact than non-college mothers with school personnel. Perhaps the school nurse represents the one individual at the school with whom the less educated mother feels comfortable.

[3] The child's teacher in the case of high school mothers refers to the English teacher.

[4] Perhaps the child of the non-college parent has difficulties in school which result in the teachers' requesting the parent to come to the school for a conference. Hollingshead's *Elmtown's Youth* is only one of many studies which find that children of working-or lower-class parents

are likely to find themselves in trouble with the teacher because of academic or behavioral deficiencies. (A. Hollingshead, Elmstown's Youth [New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1949].) Parents who reported holding a private conference with the child's teacher were asked whether they or the school had initiated the conference. It was found that non-college mothers report initiating such conferences at exactly the same rate as their better educated counterparts; 53% of both college and non-college mothers had initiated the conference.

[5] Katz and Lazarsfeld, op. cit. and Lazarsfeld, et al., op. cit.

[6] That there is a connection between having teachers as friends and serving as an opinion leader is shown by the fact that 76% of those with teachers as friends are regularly asked their opinion about school matters, while only 59% of the mothers who do not count teachers among their personal friends serve as opinion leaders.

[7] Litwak and Meyer, op. cit., p. 369.

[8] Loc. cit.

[9] Guetzkow, op. cit., p. 534.

[10] Barnard, op. cit., p. 91.

[11] D. Cartwright, "The Potential Contribution of Graph Theory to Organization Theory," in Modern Organization Theory: A Symposium of the Foundation for Research on Human Behavior, ed. M. Haire (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1959), p. 261.

[12] Blau, op. cit.

[13] Ibid., chap. 7.

[14] Katz and Lazarsfeld, op. cit. and Katz, op. cit.

[15] We are not suggesting that in low observability settings college mothers make a special effort to include teachers among their circle of friends. The fact that the proportion of college mothers with teacher friends is higher in low than in high observability settings is probably related to the lower socio-economic level of the areas in which observability is low. In these areas, college educated mothers may find that they have more basis for friendship with women who are teachers (and who therefore also have a college education) than with other mothers in the community, most of whom are of lower SES than themselves. The college mother may have fewer teacher friends in high observability (high SES) settings since here she has a larger circle of other college educated

mothers from which to draw her friends.

[16] Carter and Sutthoff, Communities and Their Schools, chap. 2.

[17] *Loc. cit.*

CHAPTER VIII

PARENTAL SATISFACTION WITH THE SCHOOL

Educational administrators have assumed that involved and knowledgeable parents will be satisfied and supportive parents. Accordingly, they have suggested extending the opportunities for parents to visit the schools, in order to increase parental understanding and support of school programs and policies.

We have seen that the provision of extensive observability arrangements by the schools is accompanied by a more involved and knowledgeable parent constituency. We turn now to the problem of assessing one consequence of such involvement and knowledge -- expressed satisfaction with the job the school is doing. Is there, in fact, a positive relationship between parental involvement and knowledge, on the one hand, and parental satisfaction and support on the other?

Small group research provides evidence that involvement in the group is positively related both to accuracy of perception of group norms and to conformity to or support of these norms.[1] Similarly, the degree of involvement in group activities has been found to be related to positive affect toward the group.[2] If we extend this principle to the relationship between an organization and its public, we may assume that the more people are involved in the activities of an organization and knowledgeable about it, the stronger will be their support of its programs.

Although there have been innumerable surveys assessing parental satisfaction with the schools,[3] few of these have attempted to determine the relationship between parental satisfaction and parental knowledge or involvement.[4] A notable exception is Cloward and Jones[5] who found that while increased involvement was related to positive attitudes toward the importance of education, it was also associated among working-class respondents with more negative attitudes toward the school as an institution. The impact of involvement on lower and middle-class mothers' satisfaction with the school was generally insignificant. Furthermore, involvement with the school was associated among all three groups, but especially among middle-class mothers, with an increased tendency to define the school as a major community problem.[6]

There are two factors to be considered, however, before we conclude as Cloward and Jones do that "school administrators must be prepared to deal with more negative attitudes toward the school if greater efforts are made to involve people in school activities."[7] First, their data are restricted to mothers whose children attend schools in a depressed area on New York's Lower East Side. The results may be somewhat different if we examine the relationship of involvement to satisfaction among mothers whose children are attending schools in middle-class city or suburban areas.

Furthermore, and Cloward and Jones also raise this point, it may be that satisfaction is not a by-product but rather a determinant of involvement or "what is even more probable is that attitudes and participation are mutually intertwined, that each is both a cause and effect of the other."[8] Like Cloward and Jones, we shall ignore the possibility of mutual effects, as well as the possibility that satisfaction is a determinant rather than a by-product of involvement. We offer two reasons for this decision.

First, surveys of the public's satisfaction with the schools find that parents with children in the schools are more satisfied with the schools than are citizens with no children in the public schools.[9] These latter may be assumed to be less involved with the school than parents of school children.[10]

A second, and more compelling reason for assuming that an attitude (satisfaction) may be the result of behavior (involvement) stems from previous research in attitude change. The housing study of Deutsch and Collins,[11] the similar study and findings of Wilner,[12] and the Brophy study of white merchant seamen, some of whom had worked with Negro sailors,[13] all found that as social distance between white and Negro decreased, so did whites' attitudes of non-prejudice increase. Litwak and Meyer sum up the argument:

> . . . it is not unreasonable to say that when parents interact with others on issues that are crucial to their children, they are affected by the interaction.[14]

Accordingly, if a relationship is found between parental involvement or knowledge and parental satisfaction with the school, as educational administrators assume, it may be that the latter is the consequence of the former. Since this assumption cannot be tested, however, we shall merely analyze the extent to which parental involvement with the school (as measured by formal contacts) is related to parental satisfaction with the school and readiness to support its financial programs.

Distribution and Correlates of Parental Satisfaction

This section examines the distribution of general or over-all parental satisfaction with the child's school and then notes variations among selected groups of mothers.

Table VIII.1 shows that most parents in our sample report being satisfied with the child's school; only 15% of the mothers report dissatisfaction. This degree of expressed dissatisfaction is generally comparable to that found in other investigations of parental attitudes toward schools.

TABLE VIII.1

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS REPORTING VARYING DEGREES OF SATISFACTION WITH THE SCHOOL BY EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Degree of satisfaction	All mothers	College mothers	Non-college mothers
Very satisfied	52%	55%	51%
Somewhat satisfied	33	32	34
Dissatisfied	15	14	16
Number of mothers	(1369)	(494)	(875)

Study	Per cent dissatisfied
Baltimore[15]	7
Fresno[16]	14
San Diego[17]	10
Utah[18]	14
Washington[19]	18
Peoria[20]	7

Unlike most studies of parental satisfaction with schools, we find that the educational background of the parent makes little difference in the overall satisfaction rate. Only 4% more college than non-college parents report that they are very satisfied with the job that the school is doing. Although a few studies have failed to note a relationship between socio-economic status and parental satisfaction,[21] most have rather consistently found that dissatisfaction with the schools increases with higher socio-economic status.[22] Cloward and Jones report, for example, that among those with children in school, about half of the lower- and working-class respondents evaluate the school favorably, while only a third of the middle-class respondents do so. In sum, they state that middle-class respondents

> . . . are more likely to consider the public school one of the major problems of the community, are less likely to feel that it is doing a good job, and are more likely to disagree with the assertion that the teachers are really interested in their students.[23]

They, as well as others who have found an inverse relationship between socio-economic status and parental satisfaction, suggest that the negative opinion voiced by middle-class respondents may reflect their higher expectation of what schools are supposed to accomplish.[24]

Cloward and Jones' respondents are all residents of a relatively deprived working-class area; therefore, we are not surprised that they express dissatisfaction with the school. We also find that if the overall satisfaction rates of mothers, both college and non-college, are examined within middle- and working-class communities (Table VIII.2), the better educated mothers in working-class areas are less satisfied with the schools than their non-college counterparts. While half of

TABLE VIII.2

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO ARE VERY SATISFIED WITH THE SCHOOL BY EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY SES

Educational background	Community SES		
	Middle-class	Working-class	Difference
College	61% (319)	35% (95)	+26%
Non-college	56 (178)	50 (516)	+6
All mothers	59% (497)	48% (611)	+11%

the non-college mothers are very satisfied with the school in the working-class community, one-third of the better educated parents in working-class areas report much satisfaction. On the other hand, in middle-class areas, both college and non-college mothers report approximately the same (high) rates of satisfaction.

As Table VIII.2 also indicates, college mothers in middle-class communities have a 26% higher satisfaction rate than those living in working-class areas. Non-college mothers, however, are only 6% less satisfied with the schools in the working- than in the middle-class communities. Thus any analysis of socio-economic differences in parental satisfaction with the community's schools must control for the predominant socio-economic level of the community.

Is the extent to which the school provides ready access to school-related information related to the satisfaction rates of the mothers in our sample? Is it possible that the general limitation of such access, which is characteristic more of the working- than the middle-class school, is contributing to the differences in satisfaction found in Table VIII.2?

TABLE VIII.3

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO ARE VERY SATISFIED WITH THE SCHOOL BY EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND COMMUNITY SES, AND OBSERVABILITY

a. All Mothers

Educational background	Observability		
	High	Low	Difference
College	62% (289)	44% (125)	+18%
Non-college	54 (210)	50 (484)	+4
All mothers	58% (499)	48% (609)	+10%
Difference between college and non-college mothers	+8%	-6%	

b. Middle-Class Communities

Educational background	Observability		
	High	Low	Difference
College	64% (259)	48% (60)	+16%
Non-college	59 (85)	53 (93)	+6
All mothers	63% (344)	51 (153)	+12%
Difference between college and non-college mothers	+5%	-5%	

c. Working-Class Communities

Educational background	Observability		
	High	Low	Difference
College	43% (30)	31% (65)	+12%
Non-college	50 (125)	50 (391)	0
All mothers	49% (155)	47% (456)	+2%
Difference between college and non-college mothers	-7%	-19%	

Table VIII.3 presents data which throw light on these questions. If we look first at the relationship of the observability setting to satisfaction of all mothers, regardless of their educational background or community's SES, we find that 58% of the mothers in high, but 48% in low observability settings are very satisfied with the school. This relationship is specified, however, when examined within middle- and working-class contexts. In middle-class areas, observability makes a 12% difference in mothers' satisfaction rates (63% very satisfied in high observability schools compared to 51% in low ones), while it makes no difference in the working-class community (49% compared to 47%).

In the same way, the observability setting has a greater relationship to the satisfaction rates of college than non-college mothers. The former have an 18% higher satisfaction rate in the high observability setting than in the low one (62% to 44%); the non-college mothers have about the same overall satisfaction rate regardless of the observability setting. This is true in both middle- and working-class communities. Particularly interesting is that college mothers in working-class areas[25] report about as much satisfaction with the high observability school (43%) as do college mothers in middle-class settings with their low observability schools (48%).

Although the community's socio-economic level contributes more to mothers' satisfaction than does observability, still the satisfaction rates of mothers, particularly college mothers, are considerably lower when observability is low. Almost 64% of these mothers are very satisfied with their high observability schools in middle-class areas; only

48% are as satisfied in these same areas when observability is low. Similarly in working-class areas the satisfaction rate is 12% higher for college mothers when an Open Door Policy prevails.

Clearly, the existence of extensive opportunities for parental knowledge means more to the college than the non-college mother. Loss of observability is accompanied by a 16% drop in the satisfaction rate of college mothers, but a 6% drop for non-college mothers in middle-class areas. Similarly, low observability in working-class areas is accompanied by a 12% reduction in the satisfaction rate for college mothers, compared to no reduction at all in the rate for non-college parents. Or it might be stated thus: the satisfaction rate of non-college mothers remains relatively unchanged under varying socio-economic or observability conditions. College mothers, on the other hand, are highly satisfied only under optimum conditions of observability and socio-economic level. Their satisfaction rate is more or less equally related to the community's socio-economic level and the observability conditions.[26]

Apparently, the extent to which the school provides opportunities for the college mother to obtain information about school matters is an important component of her overall satisfaction. We now examine several other components of parental satisfaction with the school.

Components of Parental Satisfaction

In order more fully to understand the contribution which high observability makes to mothers' satisfaction, it is necessary to examine some of the components of parental satisfaction. Let us assume we find that such satisfaction is highly related to a particular factor, we can then see whether the provision of observability arrangements has any effect in "cooling out" mothers who are dissatisfied with the particular factor. For example, it may be that mothers' satisfaction with the amount of homework assigned is a strong predictor of their overall satisfaction with the school. Is the Open Door Policy accompanied by an increase in the level of overall satisfaction for those parents who are dissatisfied with the amount of homework the school assigns? Similarly, does it have a "cooling-out effect" on mothers who are dissatisfied with the school's emphasis on sports? We find, in Table VIII.4 that the overall satisfaction of the mothers in our sample is related to a number of specific items. Although each of the twelve items is related to overall parental satisfaction, the strong relationship of the first two items indicates the extent to which the mother's attitude toward the school is anchored in practical child-centered considerations. Mothers are very satisfied when they think that the schools are preparing their children adequately for the future and when they are satisfied with their child's academic performance.

This concurs with the findings of Carter who pointed out that when parents of children in the public schools were critical of the job the schools were doing, it was usually because they felt that the children were not being prepared adequately for college or vocational

TABLE VIII.4

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO ARE VERY SATISFIED WITH THE SCHOOL BY SATISFACTION WITH SELECTED ITEMS

Selected items	Per cent of mothers who are very satisfied when response to item is: Yes	No	Per cent difference
1) Agree school is doing a good job in helping students prepare for future[a]	67 (178)	31 (262)	+36
2) Very satisfied with child's performance	66 (647)	36 (719)	+30
3) Does child like teacher very much	58 (932)	38 (398)	+20
4) Does child like school very much	60 (751)	42 (618)	+18
5) Agree with perceived goals of school[b]	58 (834)	41 (519)	+17
6) "Grouping" policy of fast children	59 (652)	42 (343)	+17
7) Satisfied with amount of homework	54 (629)	38 (286)	+16
8) Satisfied with emphases on sports	54 (966)	41 (184)	+13
9) Satisfied with perceived "grouping" policy of slow children	57 (768)	44 (350)	+13
10) Approve of perceived teacher role type[c]	57 (653)	47 (703)	+10
11) Social promotion policy	55 (561)	49 (383)	+6
12) Skipping policy	54 (513)	51 (272)	+3

[a] Asked only of high school mothers.

[b] Mothers were asked whether they felt they placed an emphasis primarily on intellectual, social, personal, or practical goals. They were also asked which emphasis they preferred.

[c] Mothers were asked:

Although teachers have to concern themselves with many different things in their jobs, some teachers emphasize certain things more opportunities.[28] Since these child-centered considerations are evidently such strong predictors of parental satisfaction, schools might measure their success in maintaining parental satisfaction by the extent to which involving parents in school affairs is accompanied by an increase in the overall satisfaction level of mothers who are dissatisfied with their child's performance in school or with the success of the school in helping the student plan for the future. As only high school mothers were asked the latter question, we will use satisfaction with the child's school performance in order to determine the effectiveness of the Open Door Policy in "cooling out," i.e. raising the general satisfaction level of mothers who are dissatisfied with this item. Since college mothers are overrepresented and non-college parents underrepresented in the high observability setting we shall control for the educational background of the parent.

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than others. Suppose there were four first (fifth, or tenth) grade teachers in (school) and you could choose the one you wanted to be (child's) teacher. Which of these would be your first choice?

Which of these best describes (child's teacher)?

Teacher #1 is most concerned with maintaining discipline, seeing that students work hard, and teaching them to follow directions.

Teacher #2 feels it's most important that students know their subject matter well, and that he (she) cover the material thoroughly and test their progress regularly.

Teacher #3 stresses making the class interesting and encourages students to be creative and to figure things out for themselves.

Teacher #4 thinks it's most important that a teacher be friendly and well-liked by students and able to understand and to handle their problems.

Don't know.[27]

The "Cooling Out" Effects of Observability and Contact

We have already seen that one of the major components of parental satisfaction is the extent to which they are satisfied with their child's performance. A measure of the effectiveness of an Open Door Policy therefore might be the extent to which mothers in high as opposed to low observability schools are satisfied with the job the school is doing, even when dissatisfied with the performance of their child. As Table VIII.5 indicates, if we ignore the educational background of the mothers for a moment, location in an Open Door School is accompanied by a slight increase (10%) in the satisfaction level of the mother who is not very satisfied with her child's performance. As long as mothers have no complaints about the child's academic performance, the Open Door Policy is unrelated to their general satisfaction with the school.

When educational background is held constant, however, we see that the "cooling-out" effect of the observability setting is somewhat greater for college than for non-college mothers. When the former are not very satisfied with the child's school performance, their overall satisfaction rate is more than twice as high in the high observability setting than in the low one (51% compared to 24%). When non-college mothers, on the other hand, are not content with the child's academic performance, the "cooling-out" effect of the high observability setting is only minimal (observability raises the satisfaction rate from 38% to 45%).

It may be that when the non-college parent visits the Open Door School, she sees all about her middle-class parents whose children are

TABLE VIII.5

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO ARE VERY SATISFIED WITH THE SCHOOL BY SATISFACTION WITH THE CHILD'S PERFORMANCE, OBSERVABILITY, AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Observability	Satisfaction with child's performance					
	All mothers		College mothers		Non-college mothers	
	Very satisfied	Not very satisfied	Very satisfied	Not very satisfied	Very satisfied	Not very satisfied
High	68% (251)	43% (247)	71% (152)	51% (137)	63% (99)	45% (109)
Low	65 (398)	33 (474)	64 (104)	24 (100)	65 (292)	38 (373)
Difference	+3	+10	+7	+27	-2	+7

performing at relatively higher levels. Her own child's poorer performance may be more visible in such a setting than it would be in low observability schools where working-class children with lower achievement levels predominate.[29] Thus she may feel relatively deprived in the high observability setting. Furthermore, the college parent has more frequent contacts with the teacher or other school personnel in the high observability setting than does the non-college one (Chapter VII). Even in the formal setting of the PTA meeting she has little hesitation in engaging the teacher in direct conversation about her child's problems.[30] The non-college parent, however, has fewer informal contacts and may be more hesitant about engaging in such conversations and thus misses the opportunity to "talk out" her problems regarding the child. In any event, it appears that the environment of the Open Door School is associated with an increase in the overall satisfaction level of the college mother who is somewhat dissatisfied with her child's school performance, but has almost no "cooling-out" effect for the non-college mother.

The observability arrangements provided by schools are obviously not sufficient to account for the "cooling-out" effect observed in Table VIII.5. It is more likely that the contacts with the school, which occur at a much higher rate in the high than in the low observability setting, account for the increase in satisfaction level of the potentially dissatisfied mother. Let us see first, then, whether formal contact with the school is itself related to the level of parental satisfaction and then examine its "cooling-out" effect for mothers who are not very satisfied with their child's performance in school.

Table VIII.6 shows that formal contact with the school has no relationship to the level of parental satisfaction. Fifty-six per cent of those who rank high on the Index of Formal School Contact, compared to 48% of those who rank low, report that they are very satisfied with the job the school is doing.

TABLE VIII.6

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO ARE VERY SATISFIED
WITH THE SCHOOL BY FORMAL CONTACT
AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Formal contact	All mothers	College mothers	Non-college mothers
High	56% (681)	56% (334)	55% (347)
Low	48 (688)	52 (160)	47 (528)

These differences both for college and non-college mothers, are too slight even to attempt to interpret. We know, however, that some formal contact takes place in low observability settings and some in high ones. Perhaps a relationship between contact and satisfaction exists when we control for observability in Table VIII.7

Clearly, contact with the school is hardly related to mothers' satisfaction, even when we control for observability. The single exception is that non-college mothers in low observability settings are somewhat more satisfied with the school when they have had formal contact than when they have not. These are the mothers who have overcome the handicap of limited observability and have maintained a high rate of contact with the school. In Chapters VI and VII, we found that they were more knowledgeable, more interested in the school, and that

TABLE VIII.7

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO ARE VERY SATISFIED WITH THE SCHOOL BY TYPE OF OBSERVABILITY-CONTACT[31] AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

a. All Mothers

Contact	Observability		
	High	Low	Difference
High	58% (383) (Utilizers)	52% (306) (Strivers)	+6%
Low	59% (127) (Rejectors)	46% (569) (Non-Strivers)	+13%
Difference	-1%	+6%	

b. College Mothers

Contact	Observability		
	High	Low	Difference
High	61% (246) (Utilizers)	42% (91) (Strivers)	+19%
Low	65% (48) (Rejectors)	47% (116) (Non-Strivers)	+18%
Difference	-4%	-5%	

c. Non-College Mothers

Contact	Observability		
	High	Low	Difference
High	53% (137) (Utilizers)	57% (215) (Strivers)	-4%
Low	55% (79) (Rejectors)	46% (453) (Non-Strivers)	+9%
Difference	-2%	+11%	

they had more informal contact with the school than other non-college types. This group of satisfied mothers may, in fact, be deriving satisfaction from the process of participating in school activities.

For college mothers, when we control for observability, formal contact makes little difference in the satisfaction rate. For this group, the observability setting, rather than involvement, is related to satisfaction with the school. It may be that schools in high observability settings are, when measured by objective criteria, better schools. Superficial impressions obtained through visits to each school were that those in high observability settings had better facilities, more classroom aids, a better maintenance staff, etc. That the college mother is more satisfied with the school in the high observability setting may reflect her ability to recognize the school's many positive features.

Interestingly, the highest satisfaction level is that expressed by the college rejector. This group, as we saw in Chapters VI and VII, not only had limited formal contact with the school, but also low rates of utilization of informal channels for obtaining information about the school. Furthermore, they expressed limited educational expectations for the child and had low rate of neighboring and of voting in school elections. Significantly, their children were doing "above average" work in school less frequently than were the children of the other college types. Although the differences are slight, it is still surprising to find the college rejectors expressing satisfaction with the school at a higher rate than all the other groups, college and non-college. Perhaps the expressed satisfaction of these mothers is a rationalization and justification of their lack of involvement due to general apathy.

For non-college mothers, satisfaction rates are generally similar with the one exception of the non-striver who is somewhat less satisfied than the other three types. Apparently her double handicap of both low involvement and limited observability is a deterrent to the maintenance of a high satisfaction level. If schools want, among other things, to have a satisfied parent public, it seems that one prerequisite is to provide mothers with arrangements through which they can become involved in the school. The minority of mothers who fail to utilize such arrangements still have high levels of satisfaction and appear to be unlikely sources of potential home-school conflict. Our data suggest that schools have little to fear from parental involvement, for such involvement is related positively in most instances with higher levels of satisfaction.

We have already presented evidence which suggests that a high observability setting is functional for "cooling-out" parents who are less than fully satisfied with their child's school performance. Observability and formal contact together have an even stronger "cooling-out" effect. Table VIII.8 shows that if mothers are very satisfied with their child's performance in school, neither observability nor involvement makes a difference in their overall satisfaction level. However, among parents who are not very satisfied with the child's school performance, the overall satisfaction rate is 32% in the low observability-low involvement group, but 48% in the high observability-high involvement group. Or we might state it thus: the relationship of satisfaction

TABLE VIII.8

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO ARE VERY SATISFIED WITH THE SCHOOL BY SATISFACTION WITH THE CHILD'S PERFORMANCE AND TYPE OF OBSERVABILITY-CONTACT

Observability-Contact Typology	Satisfaction with child's performance		Difference
	Very satisfied	Not very satisfied	
Utilizers	67% (199)	48% (178)	+19%
Rejectors	69 (52)	50 (68)	+19
Strivers	64 (156)	40 (148)	+24
Non-strivers	65 (240)	32 (325)	+33

with the child's school performance to overall satisfaction is lowest for utilizers (19%), slightly greater for strivers (24%) and highest of all (33%) for non-strivers. This difference is especially significant when we consider that the non-strivers, whom the school is unable to "cool out," are the largest group numerically speaking, 325 mothers or almost 25% of the total sample. Thus the provision of observability, and the concomitant involvement which is highly associated with observability, might add to the roster of satisfied parents.

Knowledge and Parental Satisfaction

School administrators have explicitly suggested that the provision of opportunities for parents to become involved in school matters is a prerequisite for a more knowledgeable and therefore more supportive parent body. Is parental knowledge a predictor of parental satisfaction with the school?

The answer, as Table VIII.9 shows, is rather unexpected: there is no relationship between the degree of knowledge and the level of

TABLE VIII.9

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO ARE VERY SATISFIED WITH THE SCHOOL BY EXTENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Mother ranks high on:	All mothers	College mothers	Non-college mothers
Both indices of knowledge	54% (307)	59% (173)	47% (133)
One index of knowledge	53 (497)	55 (193)	51 (303)
Personnel	50 (155)	43 (58)	54 (96)
Practices	54 (342)	60 (135)	50 (207)
Neither index of knowledge	50 (571)	48 (128)	51 (439)

satisfaction. We find that 50% of the chronic know-nothings and 54% of those who rank high on both indices of knowledge are very satisfied with the school. Similarly, knowledge is unrelated to the satisfaction of non-college parents.

Only among the better educated parents do we find any relationship between knowledge and satisfaction. Fifty-nine per cent of those who rank high on both indices, but 48% of the chronic know-nothings report that they are very satisfied with the job the school is doing. Apparently the satisfaction of the better educated parent is somewhat related to her success in obtaining information about what is going on at the school. Interestingly, these mothers are more satisfied when they are knowledgeable about school practices than personnel, while their non-college counterparts are 4% more satisfied when they know about school personnel than when they are knowledgeable about school practices. This is clearly too slight a difference to permit any conclusion other than that the level of knowledge of the non-college mother is unrelated to her expressed satisfaction with the school.

For the college mother, however, there is a positive relationship between knowledge and satisfaction.

Small group studies have shown that positive affect among members of group (satisfaction) is increased through involvement in the group. In a discussion of the mutual dependence of interaction and sentiment, Homans hypothesizes:

> If the frequency of interaction between two or more persons increases, the degree of their liking for one another will increase, and vice versa.[32]

Knowledge, or increased accuracy of perception is also a by-product of increased interaction or involvement in the group. Hopkins cites findings of small group research and he concludes that

> For any member of a small group, the greater his centrality (degree of interaction with other group members) . . . the greater his observability [which Hopkins equates with knowledge].[33]

While knowledge alone, then, may not be a predictor of parental satisfaction, the combination of involvement and knowledge may be positively related to such satisfaction. When we examine the satisfaction rates of mothers with similar amounts of both formal school contact and knowledge in Table VIII.10, we find that at every level of knowledge, high formal contact is associated with slightly higher satisfaction rates than is low contact. Among the most knowledgeable mothers, for example, 56% with high formal contact, but 48% with limited contact report that they are very satisfied with the job the school is doing. The corresponding figures for the chronic know-nothings are 54% and 48%. The data for "all mothers" suggest that involvement in the form of regular attendance at school meetings is more related to satisfaction with the school than is the knowledge which may be the

TABLE VIII.10

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO ARE VERY SATISFIED WITH THE SCHOOL BY FORMAL SCHOOL CONTACT, KNOWLEDGE, AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

a. All Mothers

Mother ranks high on:	Formal contact		
	High	Low	Difference
Both indices of knowledge	56% (224)	48% (82)	+8%
One index of knowledge	56 (259)	50 (247)	+6
Neither index of knowledge	54 (208)	48 (359)	+6
Per cent difference	+2	0	

b. College Mothers

Mother ranks high on:	Formal contact		
	High	Low	Difference
Both indices of knowledge	59% (134)	59% (39)	0
One index of knowledge	56 (136)	54 (57)	+2%
Neither index of knowledge	50 (64)	45 (64)	+5
Per cent difference	+9	+14	

c. Non-College Mothers

Mother ranks high on:	Formal contact		
	High	Low	Difference
Both indices of knowledge	51% (90)	37% (43)	+14%
One index of knowledge	58 (123)	48 (190)	+10
Neither index of knowledge	56 (144)	48 (295)	+8
Per cent difference	-5	-11	

by-product of such involvement.

An interesting specification is seen when we present the data separately for college and non-college mothers. Among college mothers the difference in satisfaction associated with contact is minimal, but, if contact is held constant, we find that greater knowledge is accompanied by a 9% increase in reported satisfaction for college mothers with high contact and a 14% increment for those with little or no formal contact. Among non-college mothers, when we control for contact we find that reported satisfaction is negatively related to knowledge, but that at every level of knowledge, satisfaction with the school is higher for those mothers who are involved in the formal opportunity-structure of the school than for those who are not. In other words, out data suggest that for college mothers, knowledge intervenes between contact and satisfaction (contact ⟶ knowledge ⟶ satisfaction). For non-college mothers, however, contact with the school is associated with higher levels of knowledge but knowledge itself is negatively related to the level of reported satisfaction (contact ⟶ knowledge ⟶ (-) satisfaction.

Cloward and Jones' data suggest that schools must be prepared for reduced levels of satisfaction if working-class parents are brought into the system.[34] Our data suggest that the non-college mother who participates in the system is somewhat less dissatisfied than her counterpart who has not been brought into the system. Since the positive relationship of contact to the satisfaction of the knowledgeable non-college mother (+14%) is slightly higher than the negative relationship of knowledge to the satisfaction of the involved one (-5%), a higher level of satisfaction among the school's less educated clientele may be expected by involving them in school affairs, than by limiting arrangements for such involvement.

Summary

Although knowledge itself is not related to the level of parental satisfaction, the knowledge which accompanies utilization of formally-structured observability arrangements appears to be related to higher levels of satisfaction. Both the extent of observability and for some mothers the extent of formal involvement, separately and jointly, have been found to be predictors of parental satisfaction with the school. Furthermore, when parents who are dissatisfied with the child's school performance are brought into the system through the formal channels, their involvement has a "cooling-out" effect in that their level of overall satisfaction is higher.[35]

Schools, however, may want more than a satisfied parent body. While expressive support may be desirable, instrumental support may be necessary to permit expansion of school facilities and programs. It is important, therefore, to examine the extent to which expressed satisfaction with the school is related to a willingness to support school financial programs and to vote in support of these programs. It remains to be seen whether involved and satisfied mothers, as compared with uninvolved dissatisfied parents, express a willingness to support school financial programs and translate this willingness into actual behavior, by voting in school elections. The next chapter examines the relationship between parental involvement, knowledge, satisfaction and support of school programs and policies.

CHAPTER VIII

FOOTNOTES

[1] See Hopkins, op. cit., chap. 3.

[2] G. Homans, The Human Group (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950), pp. 110-17.

[3] See, among others, D. Auster and J. Molstad, "Survey of Parents' Reactions and Opinions Concerning Certain Aspects of Education," Journal of Educational Sociology, 31 (October, 1957), pp. 64-74; Bloomington, Illinois Board of Education, What the People of Bloomington Think of Their Public Schools (Bloomington, Illinois: Board of Education, 1962); R. F. Campbell, Logan Looks at Her Schools (Logan, Utah: Board of Education, 1951); Denver Board of Education, Denver Looks at Its Schools (Denver, Colorado: Board of Education, 1953); H. Hand, What the Parents of Peoria Think About the Public Schools (Peoria, Illinois: Board of Education, n.d.); National Opinion Research Center, The Public Looks at Education (Denver: 1944); San Diego, California Board of Education, What San Diegans Think of the Public Schools (San Diego: Board of Education, 1951).

[4] Our indicator of involvement in this chapter is the degree of participation in school activities, that is, the degree of formal contact with the school.

[5] Cloward and Jones, op. cit. Another exception is the San Diego study which found that "of the persons who have visited a classroom while school was in session, 82% are satisfied or fairly well satisfied, against 66% who have not visited a classroom." Similarly, "those who had attended PTA meetings were more favorably inclined than those who had not. . . ." (San Diego Board of Education, op. cit., pp. 18-19.)

[6] Cloward and Jones, op. cit., pp. 211-17.

[7] Ibid., p. 213.

[8] Ibid., p. 210.

[9] See, among others, Campbell, op. cit.; Shipton and Belisle, "Who Criticizes the Public Schools?" Phi Delta Kappan (April, 1956); San Diego, California Board of Education, op. cit.; Bloomington, Illinois Board of Education, op. cit.; Carter, Voters and Their Schools, pp. 54-7. One study which found no difference between parents' and non-parents' satisfaction with the school is Hand, op. cit.

[10] One indicator of their lesser involvement is that they have a lower rate of participation in school elections. See Carter, op. cit.

[11] Deutsch and Collins, op. cit.

[12] Cited in E. Raab and S. Lipset, "The Prejudiced Society," American Race Relations Today, ed. E. Raab (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1962), pp. 40-1.

[13] Ibid., p. 41.

[14] Litwak and Meyer, op. cit., p. 418.

[15] Junior Association of Commerce of Baltimore, "What Baltimoreans Think of Their Public Schools," Baltimore Bulletin of Education (September-October, 1952), pp. 3-14.

[16] California Teachers Association, The Fresno Study (Stanford: Institute for Journalistic Studies, Stanford University, September, 1955).

[17] San Diego Board of Education, op. cit.

[18] Utah Education Association, What Utah Thinks of Its Schools (Salt Lake City: Utah Educational Association, 1956).

[19] The Public Appraises Education in the State of Washington: A Report on a Survey Made During October 1955 for the Washington Education Association.

[20] H. Hand, op. cit.

[21] See, for example, San Diego Board of Education, op. cit., p. 19.

[22] See, among others, A. K. Brimacombe, "The Construction of a Scale to Measure Adult Attitude Toward the Alberta Educational System," in Alberta Journal of Educational Research, IV (June, 1958, pp. 100-108); Shipton and Belisle, op. cit.; Carter, Voters and Their Schools. Hines and Grobman find a direct relationship between socio-economic status and parental satisfaction. They attribute this to the greater social

distance from the school of lower-class parents. (See Hines and Grobman, "What Parents Think of Their Schools and What They Know About Them," p. 18.)

[23] Cloward and Jones, op. cit., p. 208.

[24] Ibid., p. 209. The other studies which found an inverse relationship between SES and parental satisfaction did not control for the socio-economic level of the community of residence of respondents.

[25] These results may be an artifact of the small number of college mothers (30) who are located in a high observability school in a working-class area.

[26] College mothers in working-class areas, or in low observability schools, may feel relatively deprived, compared to their counterparts in middle-class areas or high observability schools. For example, 56% of the college mothers in middle-class areas, but only 12% in working-class areas think that their child's school is better than most in the United States. Similarly, 56% in high observability schools, but only 18% in low ones, compare their school favorably with others.

[27] For an analysis of mothers' preferences for the various teacher role types, see S. D. Sieber and D. E. Wilder, Teaching Styles: Parental Preferences and Professional Role Definitions, Bureau of Applied Social Research, publication number A-474 (mimeo).

[28] Carter, Voters and Their Schools, p. 125.

[29] We find that 56% of the children in high observability schools, but 46% in low ones, maintain an average of A or B.

[30] Teachers frequently complain about the fact that some mothers will seize every opportunity, even at PTA meetings or Back-to-School Nights where this is discouraged, to corner them and discuss individual problems.

[31] See Chapter VI for a description of the four types of mothers resulting from the cross-tabulation of the individual property of contact and the contextual property of observability.

[32] Homans, op. cit., p. 112.

[33] Hopkins, op. cit., p. 56.

[34] Cloward and Jones, op. cit., p. 213.

[35] Although the data are not presented here, it is interesting to note that the utilization of alternative channels is neither predictive of the level of parental satisfaction nor effective in "cooling-out" those parents who are dissatisfied with their child's performance in school. Mothers who have had casual contact with the child's teacher or who have spoken with other school personnel are no more satisfied with the school than are mothers who have not had such contacts. Nor are these contacts related to a high level of satisfaction for those mothers who are dissatisfied with the child's academic performance.

CHAPTER IX

PARENTAL SUPPORT OF THE SCHOOL

Although schools are concerned among other things with maintaining high levels of satisfaction among their parent constituency, they also are interested in obtaining financial support for expansion of physical or curricular facilities. The assumption of educational administrators has been that if parents are increasingly brought into the school they will gain a better understanding of the goals and requirements of the school and will become more active supporters of the organization.

In this chapter we shall examine the validity of this assumption. Is parental support more likely to be forthcoming from mothers as they become increasingly involved and knowledgeable? Is there a relationship between parents' overall satisfaction with the school and their willingness to support the financial needs and policies of the school?

We have selected two indicators of mothers' attitudes toward school financial matters. Parents were asked:

> Do you think there are any things the local schools are spending too much money on?
>
> Do you think there are any things that the local schools should spend more money on, even if this meant an increase in

your taxes?

Parental Satisfaction and Attitudes Toward School Finances

As Table IX.1 shows, only 16% criticize the present spending policy of the schools, while 66% indicate a willingness to see the schools spend more money, even if this involved an increase in their taxes.

TABLE IX.1

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO CRITICIZE PRESENT SPENDING POLICY AND PERCENTAGE WHO WOULD SUPPORT INCREASED SPENDING, BY SATISFACTION WITH THE SCHOOL

Satisfaction Level	Spending too much	Schools should spend more
Very satisfied	12% (554)	57% (605)
Somewhat satisfied	15 (353)	72 (389)
Dissatisfied	30 (156)	80 (194)
All Mothers	16% (1063)[a]	66% (1188)[a]

[a] The total N is somewhat smaller since those mothers who replied "don't know" to these questions were eliminated from the analysis.

Mothers who are dissatisfied with the school are more than twice as likely to criticize present spending policy (30% compared to 12%) but are also more willing to assume an added tax burden in order to see the schools spend more.[1]

It may be then that a high level of satisfaction with the school is not entirely desirable, from the standpoint of educational personnel, if it assumes the form of a passive complacency with the status quo. Active and informed dissatisfaction may be a necessary condition for innovation and change. If schools are seeking support for increased budgets and innovative programs such as the New Math or programmed learning, a certain amount of parental dissatisfaction, if properly mobilized by the school, can become a constructive force for the support of needed change in the system.

Involvement, Knowledge, and Attitudes Toward School Finances

Can schools mobilize such support by providing channels through which parents become more involved and more knowledgeable? Is there a relationship, in other words, between parental knowledge and involvement on the one hand and parental willingness to extend financial support to the school on the other?

Apparently, as Table IX.2 indicates, the mothers who know more about the school are more critical of its spending policy but are also slightly more willing to support increased school spending -- even if this meant an additional tax burden. The difference for the latter item is only 8%, but it suggests that while knowledge is associated with increased tendency to criticize, it is also accompanied by an increased readiness to shoulder a tax increase in order to support further school spending.[2]

As the balance of Table IX.2 shows, neither the amount of formal contact with the school nor the extent to which observability is provided is related either to the tendency to criticize present spending policy or the readiness to support increased spending. Nor is the extent to which mothers utilize whatever formal channels are available within each observability setting related either to financial criticism or financial readiness.[3]

TABLE IX.2

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO CRITICIZE PRESENT SPENDING POLICY AND WHO WOULD SUPPORT INCREASED SPENDING BY KNOWLEDGE, BY FORMAL CONTACT, BY OBSERVABILITY, AND BY TYPE OF OBSERVABILITY-CONTACT

Characteristics	Schools spend too much on some things	Schools should spend more
Knowledge Level		
High on Both Indices	23% (279)	69% (299)
High on One Index	13 (402)	68 (451)
Low on Both	12 (395)	61 (451)
Formal Contact		
High	17% (550)	64% (617)
Low	15 (526)	68 (584)
Observability		
High	18% (405)	64% (464)
Low	14 (671)	66 (747)
Observability-Contact Typology		
Utilizers	18% (312)	65% (350)
Rejectors	18 (93)	67 (104)
Strivers	14 (238)	63 (267)
Non-Strivers	14 (433)	68 (480)

The results of Tables IX.1 and IX.2 present us with somewhat of a dilemma. We have found that the provision of extensive observability arrangements is conducive to increased parental involvement, knowledge, and satisfaction with the job the school is doing. Clearly, if schools were concerned only with maintaining an involved, knowledgeable and satisfied parent body, the provision of formal observability arrangements would be an important step toward this end.

Schools, however, must be concerned also with the practical problem of obtaining adequate financial support of their constituents in order to expand their facilities and underwrite innovations in the curriculum. Which parents appear to be willing to support such increased school spending? We find that it is generally the parent who is less satisfied with the job the school is doing and more critical of present spending policy who expresses a readiness to shoulder an increased tax burden in order to underwrite further school spending. This suggests that, while a satisfied parent body may be desirable from the point of view of the general stability of home-school relationships, a certain amount of dissatisfaction may be functional when it comes to underwriting innovation, expansion, and change in the system.

Is there any possibility, therefore, that school personnel can "have their cake and eat it too?" In other words, can they maintain a relatively satisfied parent constituency and at the same time channel the expressed dissatisfaction into support of innovation and expansion? We think that this is possible and our data buttress this assumption. For until this point we have limited our discussion to the attitudes of satisfaction or financial willingness to support increased spending.

Involvement, Knowledge, and Voting Behavior

The test of the strength and saliency of an attitude, however, is the extent to which it results in action. As Merton points out, attitude and overt behavior can differ, and markedly so, under specified conditions. The prejudiced person, for example, does not always engage in discriminatory behavior, while the unprejudiced individual may be inactive when it comes to the support of racial integration, and may even engage in discriminatory practices.[4]

One test of a parent's expressed attitude of financial willingness is whether or not she goes to the polls to vote "yes" in the school election. Unfortunately, mothers were not asked whether they had voted for or against the school bond issue, but merely whether they had voted at all in the last school election. Although it would indeed be preferable to know how the mother voted, the lack of this information is not as serious as may be imagined.

Previous studies have found that parents with children in the public schools tend to vote in support of the school's program.[5] Furthermore, it has been found that parents turn out to vote in greater proportion than do citizens without children in public schools.[6] The regular voters are the parents, and a large turnout occurs only when a school issue has been brought to the attention of the general electorate. It is in such elections, when the turnout is relatively large, that schools frequently encounter defeat of their programs.[7] Just as the party in power usually encounters success when the turnout is small, so do schools find that a school bond is approved more frequently when the vote is a small one -- primarily by the more interested parents of school children.

If parental knowledge and involvement, so closely tied to the existence of an Open Door Policy, are also related to parental voting rates, schools should have little fear of increasing such knowledge and involvement by providing high observability for the parent body.

It remains to be seen whether parental involvement and knowledge are associated with the likelihood of voting in school elections.

TABLE IX.3

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO VOTED IN THE LAST SCHOOL ELECTION BY KNOWLEDGE, BY OBSERVABILITY, BY FORMAL CONTACT, AND BY TYPE OBSERVABILITY-CONTACT

Total	Voted in Last School Election	
	Per Cent	Number
All Mothers	42%	(1184)[a]
Knowledge Level		
High on Both Indices	62%	(265)
High on One Index	43	(430)
Low on Both	30	(489)
Observability		
High	55%	(395)
Low	36	(789)
Formal Contact		
High	55%	(576)
Low	30	(608)
Observability-Contact Typology		
Utilizer	63%	(300)
Rejectors	27	(95)
Strivers	45	(276)
Non-Strivers	30	(513)

[a] The smaller N is the result of eliminating Old Home mothers since no election was held in this community.

The average turnout rate at the polls, as Table IX.3 shows, is 42%. Less than half the parents exercise their prerogative of voting in elections which may directly affect the education of their children. Still, the turnout rate is higher when the schools provide extensive observability arrangements (55%) and even further increased when parents utilize these arrangements at a high rate (63%). Similarly, parents who rank high on both indices of knowledge have a turnout which is more than twice as high as that of the chronic know-nothings. Apparently, it is the involved and knowledgeable parents who constitute the bulk of those who actually vote.

Although involvement with the school in the form of casual contact with the teacher or contact with other school personnel is also related to turnout at the polls, this relationship is somewhat weaker than that associated with formal school contact. We find that 51% of those mothers who report casual contact with the teacher, compared to 39% of those who do not, have voted in the election. Similarly, 50% of those who have spoken with other school personnel, as opposed to 37% of those who have not, are included among the parent voters. Thus the difference in turnout rates between those who have or have not utilized the alternative channels is twelve or thirteen per cent. The difference, however, in the voting rate between those who have or have not had extensive formal school contact is 25% (see Table IX.3).

It may be that at formal school gatherings such as PTA meetings, the need for expanded school facilities and programs is discussed and parents are apprised of the importance of their vote.[8] Casual contacts with a teacher or other school personnel are not as likely to lead to discussion of the school's financial needs, nor to questions about a coming school election.

It may also be that the norms and characteristics of the mother, which propel her toward PTA attendance also favor the likelihood of her going to the polls. Other studies have found that the regular voter (in general elections) tends to be a member of at least one or more voluntary associations.[9] That the highest voting turnout among mothers in our sample occurs in suburban communities (where PTA attendance is also highest) suggests that involvement in the PTA is related to the likelihood of voting in school elections.

Formal school contact is thus a strong predictor of voting likelihood. Similarly, it was found (Table IX.3) that when parental knowledge is high, the turnout rate is more than twice as high as when parents are uninformed. When mothers are both involved and knowledgeable, as Table IX.4 indicates, the voting rate is 70%.

TABLE IX.4

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO VOTED
IN THE LAST SCHOOL ELECTION
BY FORMAL CONTACT

Knowledge	Formal Contact	
	High	Low
High	70% (187)	45% (78)
Medium	54 (212)	33 (218)
Low	40 (177)	24 (312)

On the other hand, only one of every four uninvolved chronic know-nothings turned out to vote in the last school election. Thus the turnout rate is three times as high for knowledgeable and involved parents as it is for uninvolved, uninformed ones. If school administrators want to encourage a large parental turnout at the polls, the maintenance of an involved and knowledgeable parent body through the provision of an Open Door Policy apparently contributes much to this end.

Is it possible, however, that in the process of encouraging a large parental turnout at the polls, the schools may draw a disproportionate number of dissatisfied and non-supportive parents who are likely to vote "no" on a school bond issue? Evidence to the contrary is supplied both by our own data and by other researchers who have found that the parents of children in school generally vote in favor of the school's financial program and that it is rather a large non-parent vote which is predictive of a school bond defeat.[10] In general, as was mentioned previously, surveys and polls have found parents to hold more favorable attitudes toward the schools, to criticize them less frequently, and to be more supportive of increased school spending. On the basis of evidence of past research therefore, it is not unreasonable to assume that the parent who votes in a school election will less often than others cast her vote against the bond issue.

Let us turn to our data, however, and see if it is possible to estimate the favorable vote which schools might expect under normal conditions and then compare this with the favorable vote which might be predicted were all mothers provided with extensive observability arrangements. In this way we shall be able to ascertain the extent to which the following optimistic statement by one educator is valid:

> Too often . . . small groups of educators and citizens have worked out sound and essential plans only to have them rejected for lack of broad public understanding. Fortunately, however, most school communities . . . now know that, once the people understand school needs and get involved in planning and action to meet them, money ceases to be a primary problem.[11]

Although we do not know whether mothers voted in favor of or against the bond issue, we do have an indicator of their expressed support of increased school spending. It will be remembered that mothers were asked if they thought the schools should spend more on certain things even if this meant an increase in their taxes? In Table IX.1 we saw that 66% of the mothers replied "yes" to this question, and for the moment we shall assume that if these mothers actually voted, they would have voted in favor of increased spending.

Now let us look at these two groups, supporters and non-supporters, and ascertain whether one or the other group is overrepresented among those with high formal school contact, those in high observability settings, those with a high level of knowledge, or those who fall into our category of utilizers. That is, are non-supporters perhaps drawn to the school at a higher rate than supporters? Is the non-supporter more likely to be a knowledgeable parent than is the supporter? Is she more likely to be located in a high observability setting?

Table IX.5 shows that supporters and non-supporters are equally distributed in high and low observability settings. Similarly, the same proportion of supporters as non-supporters have had formal contact with school and approximately the same proportion are equally knowledgeable.[12]

Finally utilizers, whom we have found to have a particularly high turnout rate in school elections, constitute 29% of both supportive and non-supportive parents. We see, then, that by maintaining an Open Door Policy, by involving mothers in school activities, and by

TABLE IX.5

PERCENTAGE AND NUMBER OF SUPPORTERS AND NON-SUPPORTERS WITH VARYING DEGREES OF OBSERVABILITY, FORMAL CONTACT, KNOWLEDGE, AND TYPE OF OBSERVABILITY-CONTACT

Totals	Supporters		Non-Supporters	
	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number
1) Observability				
High	38%	(299)	38%	(155)
Low	62	(493)	62	(254)
2) Formal Contact				
High	50%	(397)	53%	(220)
Low	50	(395)	47	(189)
3) Knowledge				
High	26%	(205)	23%	(94)
Medium	39	(311)	34	(140)
Low	35	(276)	43	(175)
4) Observability-Contact Typology				
Utilizers	29%	(229)	29%	(121)
Rejectors	9	(70)	9	(34)
Strivers	21	(168)	24	(99)
Non-Strivers	41	(325)	38	(155)
Number of Mothers		(792)		(409)

encouraging an informed parent body, schools are neither drawing upon a disproportionate number of supporters or non-supporters.

A Hypothetical Election

We saw in Table IX.1 that 66% or 792 mothers stated that they would like to see the school spend more on some things even if this meant an increase in their taxes. Obviously, if they all turned out at the polls and voted "yes," the bond issue would be overwhelmingly passed, by almost 400 votes.[13]

How many supporters and non-supporters, however, actually did vote?

TABLE IX.6

PROPORTION OF SUPPORTERS AND NON-SUPPORTERS AMONG VOTING MOTHERS

Voting Mothers	Supporters		Non-Supporters		Number of Mothers
	Per Cent	Number	Per Cent	Number	
Total	66%	(310)	34%	(154)	(464)

Among all voters (464 mothers), 66% were supporters and 34% were non-supporters; the polls were attracting supporters and non-supporters in the same proportion as their distribution in the total sample. Thus, of those who turned out at the polls, 310 or 66% could be expected to vote "yes"; 154 or 34% to have voted "no."

As a first step therefore we see that in encouraging parents to vote, schools are not attracting disproportionate numbers of non-supportive parents. Since they start out with twice as many supporters as non-supporters in the general parent body, the non-supporters would have to be drawn to the polls at twice the rate of supporters in order for a bond issue to be defeated.

We have already seen that involvement and knowledge are related to the likelihood of voting in a school election. We have also seen that supporters and non-supporters are about equally represented among the involved and the knowledgeable mothers. If supporters and non-supporters are involved in school activities, or knowledgeable about school matters at approximately the same rates, but the former outnumber the latter by a margin of two to one, then we can assume that there are almost twice as many involved or knowledgeable supportive parents, as non-supportive ones. A glance at Table IX.5, where the actual numbers appear in parentheses, shows this to be true.

Let us carry the argument a bit further. We saw in Table IX.4 that involved and knowledgeable mothers voted at a rate of 70%. We now present the same data controlling for support.

TABLE IX.7

PERCENTAGE OF MOTHERS WHO VOTED IN THE LAST SCHOOL
ELECTION BY FORMAL CONTACT, KNOWLEDGE, AND
SUPPORT OF INCREASED SCHOOL SPENDING

Knowledge	High Formal Contact		Low Formal Contact	
	Supporters	Non-Supporters	Supporters	Non-Supporters
High	70%	73%	50%	31%
Medium	54	57	36	26
Low	45	46	24	24

When mothers have had high formal contact with the school, at all levels of knowledge the turnout rate is approximately the same for supporters as for non-supporters. For involved and knowledgeable mothers the rate is 70% for supporters, 73% for non-supporters.

When mothers have only limited formal contact with the school, there is a tendency for supporters to vote at a higher rate than non-supporters, unless knowledge is very low. Our purpose, having established that voting rates for involved and knowledgeable mothers are similar whether or not increased spending is supported, is to determine the significance of this fact for the expectation of a "yes" vote.

We stated before that at the present voting rate of 42%, the school could have expected a bond issue to be passed by a majority of 156 (310 supporters -- 154 non-supporters). Let us suppose, however, that the voting rate was raised to the level of 70% which was found to obtain for involved and knowledgeable parents. The number of supporters, as Table IX.5 showed, is 792; the number of non-supporters, 409. If the voting rate were raised to those levels which were found to obtain for involved and knowledgeable mothers (Table IX.7) we could expect the following result:

"Yes": 70% of 792 supporters, or 554
"No": 73% of 409 non-supporters, or 299

This would produce a margin of 255 "yes" votes. That is, at a voting rate of 70% school administrators could expect a margin of 100 more "yes" votes than at the actual voting rate of 42%. From the standpoint of those who are seeking increased funding, therefore, the provision of observability arrangements, through which parents become more knowledgeable and involved, can contribute considerably to the likelihood of a larger margin of "yes" votes in school bond elections. Under these conditions, the less school personnel will have to fear that a large turnout of the general electorate will be successful in defeating a bond issue.

Summary

An Open Door Policy appears to have consequences beyond those of increasing parental involvement in the schools and knowledge about them. It is associated with a reduction of the gap between middle-class and working-class parental involvement and knowledge. It increases the opportunities not only for formal, but for informal school contacts. It serves as a means of maintaining a relatively high level of parental satisfaction; in fact, it tends to have a "cooling out" effect on potential critics who are dissatisfied with their child's academic performance. And finally, a by-product of its positive relationship to involvement, knowledge, and satisfaction levels seems to be its strong effect in moving mothers' to action, that is to voting in school elections, for almost three out of every four involved and knowledgeable mothers is a voter.

If school officials are concerned among other things with maintaining an involved, knowledgeable, and actively supportive parent constituency, the provision of an Open Door Policy may contribute substantially toward this end.

Some of our findings, however, raise questions which extend beyond the confines of the school. The final chapter summarizes our results and examines some of the broader implications of our findings.

CHAPTER IX

FOOTNOTES

[1] A cross-tabulation of these two items yields the following results:

Schools Should Spend More

Schools spend too much on some things		Yes	No	Number of Mothers
	Yes	75%	25%	(157)
	No	62%	38%	(776)

The 118 mothers who feel that the schools are spending too much on some things and should spend more on certain things do not raise any problem as to the consistency of their responses. Most of these mothers felt the schools were spending too much on "frills," such as playground equipment, art supplies, etc., but should spend more on teachers' salaries, more personnel, etc.

[2] It is interesting to note that increased knowledge is also associated with a reduced proportion of "don't know" responses regarding these financial questions. The "don't know" rate is four times as high on both questions for the chronic know-nothings than it is for those who rank high on both indices of knowledge.

[3] We did find, however, that mothers with high formal contact and mothers in high observability settings have a lower rate of "don't know" responses regarding these financial questions. Apparently, while involvement in school matters is unrelated to either financial criticism or financial willingness, it does tend to reduce the reluctance or inability of mothers to express an opinion regarding these matters.

[4] R. K. Merton, "Discrimination and the American Creed," Discrimination and the National Welfare, ed. R. M. MacIver (New York: Harper, 1948), pp. 99-126.

[5] Carter, Voters and Their Schools.

[6] Loc. cit.

[7] Carter and Sutthof, Communities and Their Schools.

[8] Several principals and teachers, when asked what their PTA's actually did, explicitly mentioned that at PTA meetings parents were urged to support forthcoming bond issues.

[9] See, among others, W. Erbe, "Social Involvement and Political Activity," American Sociological Review, XXIX (April, 1964), pp. 198-215; H. Maccoby, "The Differential Political Activity of Participants in a Voluntary Association," ibid. (October, 1958), pp. 524-32; and Wright and Hyman, op. cit.

[10] Carter, Voters and Their Schools.

[11] R. E. Larsen, "Laymen Help Plan the High School of the Future," in Chase and Anderson, op. cit., p. 269.

[12] That slightly more non-supporters than supporters are chronic know-nothings (43% compared to 35%) can only add weight to our argument for we know that the chronic know-nothings have a low voting rate.

[13] Since this is a hypothetical case, we are assuming that the mothers in the sample constitute one voting group. Actually, of course, they are located in different school districts.

CHAPTER X

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In Chapter I we suggested that there are four problems which emerge from Merton's discussion of observability:

1) The *identification of specific arrangements* which groups provide in order to keep members or non-members informed about norms and role-performances in the group;

2) The isolation of those factors which are associated with the *differential distribution* of such arrangements;

3) The establishment of the *relationship between access to knowledge and actual knowledge*; and

4) The testing of the notion that observability is a *functional requirement* for the effective exercise of social control.

The major part of the analysis (Chapters III-VI) focussed on the third problem, while Chapters II and VII treated the first two problems. In Chapters VIII and IX we attempted to assess some of the consequences of observability using as indicators the expressed satisfaction of mothers, their willingness to support increased school spending, and their expected rate of voting in favor of a school bond issue. This latter indicator approximates a measure of the social control which parents may exercise over the school. This chapter reviews our major findings under the headings of each of the above problem areas, and discusses their implications for the public schools (20 of which served as the research site of this investigation) and for organizations in general which are accountable to the public, or some segment of the public, and over whom these latter exercise a measure of social control.

The Identification of Formal and Informal Observability Arrangements

The schools in our sample employed a variety of arrangements designed to keep parents informed about school matters. Since an integral part of the analysis was the extent to which certain arrangements, when utilized by mothers, are related to knowledge about the school, it was decided to include only those arrangements for which the rates of utilization by mothers could be ascertained. Three such arrangements, which principals and teachers explicitly noted were designed to promote parental knowledge about the school, were the PTA, the Back-to-School Night, and the Scheduled Conference for All Parents. Accordingly, these were described in detail, and each school was rated high or low on an Observability Index, depending upon whether these arrangements appeared singly or in combination.

Observability, or access to information about a group is not limited to those formal arrangements which the group itself may provide. Differential location in the social system may enable some to obtain such information more readily than others. Similarly informal networks directly connected with the school, or strategically located in different community settings may provide observability for some groups of parents. Accordingly, Chapter VII identified a number of channels (other than the formal school-structured arrangements) through which information about the school might be obtained. Informal observability arrangements might range from a cup of coffee with an informed neighbor to friendship with a school board member. We identified the following informal channels, for which mothers' utilization rates could be ascertained: casual contact with the child's teacher, contact with the school principal or other school personnel (such as the nurse, librarian, coach, etc.), private non-school-scheduled conferences with the teacher, talking with the child or with other parents about the school, serving as an "opinion leader" about school matters, and having teachers as personal friends.

Some schools provide only limited formal observability arrangements; parents are dependent primarily on informal channels for information about the school. We suspected, however, that these informal channels themselves are not randomly distributed in the population but that they are more readily accessible to those of higher socio-economic status. We suspected too, that this may partly account for the rather consistent finding of previous studies that the extent of parental knowledge is directly related to the socio-economic status of parents. Accordingly, the distinction between formal and informal observability arrangements enabled us to investigate a further problem: the extent to which usual class differences in parental knowledge about schools are modified when the school intervenes by providing formal observability arrangements rather than leaving parents to obtain information on their own through informal channels.

The Differential Distribution of Observability Arrangements

The American ideology of equality of opportunity does not apply to the distribution of observability arrangements among the schools in the sample. Although all the schools provided at least one of the three arrangements, patterned variations were noted in the extent to which these arrangements appeared singly or in combination. It appeared that the size of the school (or of its client body) and the actual or perceived normative demand for such arrangements were predictors of their distribution. Accordingly, we found that scheduled conferences were not held on the high school level or in the two largest elementary schools. Similarly, teachers and principals (inaccurately) perceived suburban and elementary school mothers' interest and concern with the schools as being greater than that of non-suburban or high school mothers and they provided more observability arrangements for suburban and elementary school parents than for non-suburban and high school ones. Although there was little difference in the expressed concern about school matters among middle- and working-class mothers, perhaps the former are more vocal than the latter in making their concern evident to school personnel for these arrangements were more prevalent in middle-class than in working-class schools.

That working-class, non-suburban, and high school mothers are "observability-starved" groups would not be too serious from the standpoint of parental knowledge had we not also found that informal observability channels are also less accessible to some of these same groups. The informal observability channels were used more frequently by the same mothers who were provided with formal observability arrangements. We suggested that accessibility to these informal channels may be an unintended by-product of the formal arrangements; mothers who attend PTA meetings or Back-to-School Nights might have opportunities during these gatherings to engage in casual contact with the teacher, talk with other school personnel, or talk with other parents about school matters. Similarly, the middle-class, or better educated mother (who attends these meetings), is more likely to serve as an opinion leader about school matters or to have teachers as friends, and is less reticent about discussing school problems with the teacher. It is only in the small town or rural community, where formal observability is limited, that these informal channels are accessible and seem to serve as alternative sources of knowledge. Working-class, or non-college mothers, appear to be doubly deprived in that their children's schools are providing only limited formal observability arrangements and at the same time, these mothers have only limited access to other channels which may be sources of parental knowledge. In sum, we found that the size and normative climate of an organization exercise a constraint on the kinds and number of formal observability arrangements it provides. Correspondingly, access to information through informal channels is a function of the different status-sets of people who are located in various parts of the social system.

The Relation Between Opportunity for Knowledge and Actual Knowledge

Both formal and informal observability arrangements were found to be directly related to parental knowledge about the school. In every school and community setting mothers who had utilized a given arrangement had greater knowledge than those who had not about school personnel and practices. Furthermore, both formal observability arrangements and informal channels were associated with higher levels of parental knowledge when they were utilized in high observability settings than in low ones. In other words, the observability climate was found to have a "spillover effect" on parental knowledge, beyond the "effect" of contact.

For some mothers, however, in some community settings, the provision of observability arrangements was accompanied by higher levels of knowledge than for others. Similarly, when observability was limited, the level of knowledge of some mothers was relatively unchanged, while the level of knowledge of others dropped sharply. For example, better-educated mothers or mothers in small towns had only slightly less information about school personnel and practices when observability was limited than when it was high. For the less-educated mother or the suburban one, however, a high observability setting seemed to be a prerequisite for knowledge about school matters. Our data suggested that those mothers whose level of knowledge was about the same, regardless of the observability setting, were using informal channels as alternative sources of information when formal arrangements were limited.

Utilization of these informal channels themselves, however, were accompanied by higher levels of knowledge for some mothers than for others. Almost all mothers reported that they talk to their children daily about school matters, for example, but such conversations were associated with higher levels of knowledge for the college than the non-college mother. Similarly, many mothers reported discussing school matters with other parents, but these conversations too were accompanied by a higher informational level for the better educated mother.

Furthermore, since the informal channels were utilized more frequently and the level of knowledge associated with their use was higher in high than in low observability settings, the gap in knowledge between the college and the non-college mother was found to be much greater in the low than in the high observability setting. The limitation of formal observability, in sum, constitutes a double handicap for the less educated mother. She is deprived of the formal observability arrangements which are so highly associated with knowledge about school matters, and in addition, has only limited access to alternative sources of information. The provision of high observability by schools, on the other hand, is accompanied by a noticeable reduction of the knowledge gap between those in high and low socio-economic statuses.

Observability as a Functional Requirement for Inter-System Integration

The limitations of the data precluded rigorous analysis of the *consequences* of observability and knowledge for schools and their parent-clients. Chapters VIII and IX, however, presented data on parental satisfaction and support of school spending policy which permit some tentative suggestions.

Was the provision of observability arrangements (and the increased level of parental involvement and knowledge associated with them) accompanied by higher levels of parental satisfaction and support? We found that the satisfaction expressed by parents was somewhat greater in high than in low observability settings but that knowledge itself was unrelated to the level of satisfaction with the school. Furthermore, while less satisfied parents were more critical of the spending policy of the school, at the same time they more often advocated increased school spending and were more likely to vote in favor of a school bond issue. Clearly, a certain amount of dissatisfaction is functional in maintaining active parental support of school programs and policies, while expressed satisfaction may be a reflection of general apathy.

We found, for example, a small group of college mothers who had only limited contact, both formal and informal, with the school even though they were located in high observability settings. Their level of knowledge was lower than that of other college mothers, their children were doing relatively poorly in school, and yet these mothers had the highest rate of satisfaction of all mothers, college and non-college. From the standpoint of educational administrators, therefore, a certain degree of apathy may be functional for the maintenance of smooth school-home relationships.

That an apathetic group may still not interfere with the realization of certain collective goals is hardly a new idea. The functions of apathy for the maintenance of consensus and stability in a democratic society have been discussed by many sociologists. Lipset notes that

> . . . while the case for higher levels of participation may seem almost self-evident to believers in democracy . . . some people have questioned whether high participation is a good thing.[1]

He cites Riesman, who argued that

> . . . governmental bodies and large-scale organizations function well in spite of great apathy.[2]

Similarly, Berelson has asked:

> How could a mass democracy work if all the people were deeply involved in politics? Lack of interest by some people is not without its benefits too. . . . Some people are and should be highly interested in politics, but not everyone is or needs to be.[3]

Thus the apparent apathy and lack of participation of the small but satisfied group of college rejectors may be far from dysfunctional for the maintenance of stable home-school relations. Dissatisfaction, on the other hand, was related to increased willingness to support further school spending. That voting rates (in school bond elections) were highest for those mothers who were involved in the formal opportunity-structure of the school suggests that parental dissatisfaction may be successfully channeled into support of school goals and programs by involving the parent in this formal opportunity-structure.

One form of social control which parents exercise over schools is their ability to pass or defeat a proposed school bond. In this limited sense, the provision of parental observability is functional for the effective exercise of social control. Correspondingly, communicative integration, or the extent of the communicative contacts between school and parent, appears to bear some relationship to the degree of functional integration in the sense of "the realization of certain collective goals through collaborated activity."[4] Those parents who become involved in school activities, and knowledgeable about them through the formal opportunity-structure of the school, contribute to the realization of at least one goal of school personnel, namely, active support of the school's efforts to expand its programs and facilities.

Substantive and Theoretical Speculations

This investigation has focussed on several specific problems bearing on the matter of integration between home and school. It has restricted itself to an analysis of several observability arrangements, their location, their utilization, and their relationship to parents' knowledge about selected school characteristics and to parental satisfaction and support of their children's schools. To focus on these few school-structured arrangements and their correlates, however, is not to overlook a number of substantive and theoretical questions which bear on the problem of school-home relationships in particular and on organizational integration in general. Further research might be guided by the following substantive questions:

1) Does the relationship between observability and parental knowledge about the school apply to knowledge which is not certified by objective criteria of evidence? Do parents in high observability settings know more about the goals of the school or the role-performance of the teacher?[5] Are they more often "correct" in describing the teacher as he describes himself?[6]

2) Are mothers in high observability settings more likely than those in low ones to express consensus with school personnel about school goals and policies? We know that they are somewhat more satisfied with the school in general, but are they more in agreement with school personnel regarding the school's goals, or the advisability of certain school practices? Analysis of the relationship between observability and consensus between school personnel and mothers on selected items might provide a test of Landecker's proposition that the degree of communicative integration will bear some relationship to the inte-

gration among its cultural standards.[7]

3) While observability may be functional for the effective exercise of social control by parent-clients, educational administrators must also concern themselves with teachers' morale. Do teachers in the Open Door schools, where increased parent-teacher contact occurs, feel that parents are interfering with their professional "need for privacy?"[8] An analysis of teachers' and principals' responses under conditions of high and low observability might lead to some tentative conclusions about the delicate balance between the "need to know" and the "need for privacy."

4) A replication of this study in a larger sample of schools in different community settings would provide a test of the validity of our results. Especially desirable would be more indicators of formal observability arrangements in order to establish not only the relative effectiveness of each arrangement, but also the optimum combinations of such arrangements for the maintenance of a high level of parental involvement, knowledge, and support.

The demand for power by parents, especially in the ghetto populations of our large cities, places an increasing burden on schools to provide parents with more information about the operations of schools in order to ensure that such power will be exercised by informed and knowledgeable parent groups. Furthermore, current trends toward decentralization, i.e. the breaking up of large school districts into smaller, local self-governing units, attests that our investigation and the substantive questions we have raised are hardly academic.

Although the present investigation provides leads as to some of the factors which may narrow the communication gap between home and school, it raises certain general questions which merit discussion.

We suggested in Chapter I that every organization operates in the context of a wider environment with which it must articulate to some degree. We suggested too, that organizations which are subject to social control by a given public must provide arrangements through which their operations become visible to that public. In actual fact, however, organizations differ in the extent to which such visibility is not only required, but expected. Americans, for example, feel that they have little right to know about the activities and operations of the F.B.I. or the C.I.A. On the other hand, the public expects that it has a full right to know about the financial activities of political parties or the campaign expenditures of political candidates.

With respect to schools, expectations are somewhat unclear. The democratic rhetoric of educational administrators proclaims the importance of parents' knowing what goes on in the schools. It is unclear, however, whether the schools' desire to keep parents informed represents a concern for this democratic rhetoric or a concern for obtaining financial support at the polls. If the latter is so, we might speculate as to the extent of parental involvement and the type of parental knowledge which is functional for maintaining parental satisfaction and support. When questioned, parents report that they want to know about "curriculum, methods of teaching, school services, administrative details of school peration, the teacher, and relationships pertaining throughout the school."[9] Our data suggest, however, that these matters may not be as salient to parents as are the basic questions of how well their children are doing in school and how adequately the school is preparing their children for college and career (see Chapter VIII).

One might well raise the question, therefore, as to what parents feel they must know and have a right to know about their child's school, as well as whether knowledge of some aspects of the school are more relevant than others when it comes to parental satisfaction and support.

Despite the explicit statements of educators regarding the importance of an involved and knowledgeable parent body, are there certain areas which the school tries to insulate from observability? Our data suggest (Chapter IV) that principals are reluctant to make certain administrative practices, such as grouping, skipping, or social promotion, visible to parents. While school personnel may feel that part of their success in maximizing the welfare of their student-clients depends on their ability to coopt the parent as a willing and knowledgeable partner in the education process, at the same time they may feel the need to guard their professional prerogatives against intrusion by the layman.

Educational goals, standards, and practices in the schools are determined at the professional level by superintendents, principals, and teachers. Still, there exists a tradition of zealously guarding these prerogatives against intrusion by the layman, especially the parent. Becker, for example, states that to the teacher

> . . . the parent appears as an unpredictable and uncontrollable element, as a force which endangers and may even destroy the existing authority system over which she has some measure of control.[10]

As a defense against challenges to professional authority by parents, most schools have institutionalized the expectation that principal and colleagues "back the teacher up" in all cases of parental interference.

An area of tension between school and home might exist if matters about which parents want to know are included among those which schools prefer to keep under wraps. Further research might investigate, therefore, those things which are salient to parents as well as those matters which schools may attempt to insulate from parental observability.

In conclusion, some of our findings have raised questions which extend beyond the confines of the school-parent system. Clearly, a next step is to apply some of the techniques of the present investigation to an analysis of other organizations which must articulate with the public or some segment of the public. In this way we may come to a better understanding of the ways in which society maintains a degree of integration among its sub-units through the communication system.

CHAPTER X

FOOTNOTES

[1] S. Lipset, Political Man (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1960), p. 217.

[2] Loc. cit.

[3] B. P. Berelson, P. F. Lazarsfeld, and W. N. McPhee, Voting (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), pp. 314-15.

[4] Parsons and Shils, op. cit., p. 197.

[5] Preliminary analysis shows a slight but consistent positive relationship between observability or formal school contact and the number of "correct" responses concerning the teacher's role-performance. Similarly, fewer mothers in high observability settings than in low ones respond "don't know" to these role-performance items. Interestingly, the informal channels appear to provide greater observability of the teacher's role-performance than the formal arrangements. Casual contact with the teacher and, not surprisingly, talking with the child daily about school matters are the two channels most highly associated with a high percentage of "correct" responses and a low percentage of "don't know" answers.

[6] See Sieber and Wilder, op. cit., for a description of the four "teacher-types." Such an analysis was beyond the scope of this investigation but could provide information about the extent to which observability is related to knowledge of other school-related items.

[7] Landecker, op. cit., p. 23.

[8] Preliminary analysis of these questions indicates that 26% of the teachers in high observability schools, but only 7% in the low observability ones, state that parents tend to interfere in school matters. Similarly, 41% of the former, but 27% of the latter, report that a parent has ever tried to get them to do something differently (e.g. change a grade). On the other hand, 65% of both groups feel their job is very rewarding and only 9% of both groups would like to be teaching elsewhere.

[9] I. W. Stout and G. Langdon, "What Parents Want to Know About Their Child's School," *The Nation's Schools*, LX, No. 2 (August, 1957), p. 45.

[10] H. Becker, "The Teacher in the Authority System of the Public School," in *Complex Organizations: A Sociological Reader*, ed. A. Etzioni (New York: *Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1961*), p. 251.

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